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THE MYSTERY OF A SHIPYARD

RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE

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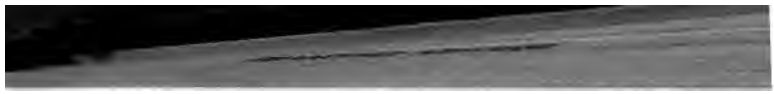

The Mystery of a Shipyard

The Mystery of a Shipyard

By

RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE

AUTHOR OF

"MY OFFICIAL WIFE," "AN EXILE FROM LONDON," ETC.

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THE MYSTERY OF A SHIPYARD.

BOOK I.

THE SEALED PACKET.

CHAPTER.		PAGE.
I.	Carte Blanche	5
II.	Berry of the Artillery	29
III.	"He Is My Chum in Paris"	63
IV.	A Breakfast at the Marine Ministry	91

BOOK II.

A STRANGE ALLIANCE.

CHAPTER.		PAGE.
V.	"We Will Meet Again, Soon"	122
VI.	The Fastest Boat Ever Built	147
VII.	"To Order"	172
VIII.	The Tiger Hunt	192

CONTENTS.

BOOK III.

HELD FOR THE OWNERS.

CHAPTER.		PAGE.
IX.	A Record Run - - - - -	221
X.	An American Appeal - - - -	246
XI.	Half the Truth - - - - -	273
XII.	A Dinner of Surprises - - - -	291

The Mystery of a Shipyard

THE MYSTERY OF A SHIPYARD.

A NOVEL

By Richard Henry Savage.

BOOK I.

The Sealed Packet.

CHAPTER I.

CARTE BLANCHE.

"Telegram, Sir," said "Handsome Jones," the prince of colored bellboys and the autocrat of the sixth floor at the Palace Hotel of San Francisco. He had entered Major Walter Wardlawe's corner suite with his customary signal of two double knocks.

Wardlawe threw down his vernier rule and compasses and then rose from a huge table drawn into an angle of the room for the best light.

"Wait! There may be an answer!" wearily said the Major, glowering at the forbidding exterior of Market street, seen through the pitiless rain gusts of a January morning of "eighty-five."

"All right; no answer," dreamily remarked Wardlawe, as he dropped the yellow paper with its warning imprint "Cable," and a single written written word, "Come," followed by the signature "Ixion."

The mulatto's eyes followed this princely master of tips, as the Major, opening his desk, thrust a folded parchment into his bosom and then carefully selected three mild Trichinopoly cigars.

"I am going away, Jones," seriously remarked the alert veteran, "for several months. I will leave you my private latch-keys.

"Of course, the office will have all the others. I am rather particular that no 'parties' shall be given here in my absence, and you must prevent the surreptitious letting of this suite for poker parties, mining deals, or 'private conferences'! You will accumulate your reward—on my return—just in proportion as you sail close to these orders!"

"There'll be no monkeying, Sir!" began Jones with an eager protestation. "Spare me," curtly said Wardlawe.

"After my Australian trip I found three poker decks and an empty whisky flask hidden in my bookcase. After the South African voyage—I regret to say—a shell side-comb and a pink powder puff stowed away in one of my tobacco boxes!"

"That was other people, Major!" said Jones, with his gleaming eyes fixed on the floor. "I always blamed Lena.

"Of course, you'll have your own story," blandly remarked Wardlawe, grasping his hat and stick; "and you know I don't believe a word of it! 'Quod facit per alium, facit per se.' Look out for all! Call a coupé into the court! Come in to-night and pack me up. I take the morning train to Virginia City."

"Mail to follow, Sir," earnestly demanded Jones.

"Turn all in at the office. I do not know where am going, and mark me, young man, I am simply 'out'; that's all you know! I do not wish even a book or paper moved till I return. Air the rooms yourself! I shall cut off Lena's prowling around here! No more 'lèse-majesté.'"

"Very good, Sir!" the valet answered. "I'll earn your good wishes and obey you. Them women is witches! They make all the trouble in this world!"

"You have unconsciously uttered a great truth,

Jones!" said the Major with mock gravity as he strode away.

Jones followed his retreating master with an admiring eye, and, when he heard the clang of the "elevator," sighed in disappointment and quickly selected two Trichinopolies with a far less critical scanning than the man who had paid for the whole box.

"I wonder where he is going?" mused the captain of the "sixth floor watch," as he gazed around at the splendid corner suite.

The five rooms were littered with books, scientific instruments, traveling outfit and a workman-like assortment of guns, canes, whips, and even a pet McClellan saddle was tossed carelessly in the farthest corner.

A superb portrait frame, closely veiled from the vulgar eye, indicated the home of a not yet forgetful widower, while a battered battle sword and a tattered war flag told of the stormy days when Wardlawe had earned the right to ride as a boy Major, at twenty-five, in the grand review which closed the "late unpleasantness."

Peeping out of the new Montgomery street corner, Jones cautiously removed his appropriated cigar as he saw Major Wardlawe emerge from the railroad ticket office near by, under the Grand, and the coupé then dash down Market street. "He's got his ticket!" sadly said Jones. "And he's as silent as a stone Injun! I wonder where he is going to!"

Roused to a sense of the imperilled reward, Jones sharply rang the maid's bell and proceeded to deliver himself in good round words to the strangely attractive Lena, a winsome quadroon who had achieved the dubious honor lately of attending a masked ball with her millionaire stock broker friend of the sixth floor tastefully arrayed in his absent wife's diamonds and best opera cloak.

"Hy'ars an end, Lena, of all funny business!" severely said Jones. "The Major's goin' away for three months, and only I am to enter these rooms! I carry the latch-keys. To-morrow you'll fix all up! Then no more meddling! I'm held responsible!"

"Where do I come in, Frank?" softly said the quadroon, fixing her splendid eyes upon him.

"I'll get a hundred when he comes back and, Lena, you get twenty of it if you watch these other yellow devils! It's business—from the word go! The old man got mad and was firing Latin at me! He found some of the things left over from these little 'off color' parties!" "Very good!" frankly said Lena. "It's a go! We'll use Mr. Van Rensselaer's rooms now! He's always down to Menlo, anyway! Remember, I cash in a twenty!"

While the servants sauntered out to furtively watch the seething intrigues of the ungainly hollow cube, which is the social "omnium gatherum" of the Occidental city, Walter Wardlawe was rapidly nearing the Russian Consulate General on Battery street.

He had already a New York railway ticket, with its through "sleepers," in his pocketbook, and he had telegraphed to retain a cabin on the "Aurania." for Liverpool.

"Let me see—passport—bank—I think that is all!" mused Wardlawe.

"Orders to the great Count Smith, and I will surely find the Chief at the Union Club at his one o'clock luncheon.

"It is a long road and an unpleasant trip at this season of the year!"

The soldier engineer sprang out, nimbly, as the coupé stopped under the consular blazon of the double-headed eagle of the Romanoffs.

A lean, sad-eyed Vice-Consul mechanically took Wardlawe's passport and reluctantly pushed back the change of a five-dollar gold piece. "The Consul-General will sign it at once, Sir," he meekly said, with the dejected air of the Muscovite minor official.

There was the sound of a chair quickly pushed back in the inner room, the odor of a never extinct "papyrus" of volcanic power, and Dimitri Gorlitz, His Imperial Russian Majesty's Consul General, bustled to the door.

"Come in here, Major," he heartily cried, throwing open the sacred gate.

Round, stocky, with a bushy yellow beard and gleaming spectacles, the official was a man of marked personality.

A leader of society, a master of all languages, a dilettante in all the arts, a "first nighter" from "Nob Hills" beauty shows, to the most surreptitious "prize-fight" and, sportsman, gambler, "viveur," man of the world, par excellence, Dimitri Gorlitz was heartily disliked by many, feared by more, and beloved for his astounding mental gifts by those who could see the philosopher hiding under the Tartar shell.

"Where are you going to, in Russia?" demanded Gorlitz with his customary abruptness.

Major Wardlawe eyed the study Slav of fifty-five, equally strong as gourmand and devourer of the belles-lettres.

"I prefer not to answer," the American coldly said, his bronzed face flushing crimson.

Wardlawe, at forty-five, was still as lithe as a panther, and yet older than his years, for he had never recovered the fatal drain of living on his young manhood, in the Army of the Potomac.

Dark eyes gleamed fixedly under his waving curly hair; a sweeping soldierly mustache hid the firm lines of his mouth, and he was gifted with that squareness of jaw and "plenty of nose" which the mighty Bonaparte desired in his select "food for powder."

Athletic, yet elegant in his build, traveler, horseman, sportsman, linguist and dead shot, he was an ugly customer to meet in the "Bad Lands" or out on the sandy wastes of the Rio Grande.

Silent, self-contained, true to the memory of a sweet woman buried ten years before, the American soldier-engineer was still a persona grata in the Four Kingdoms, as well as on the Rhine, Seine, Danube, the Tiber and the Spree.

"Excuse me, Major," hastily interjected Gorlitz. "I will finish your passport first and then, explain myself!"

With a flowing hand he affixed his cabalistic endorsement under the blue official stamp of the mighty

Alexander III., the Czar and the Autocrat of all the Russias.

Handing it briskly to the still agitated Wardlawe, the sly Consul-General said: "I must see you before you go! When do you leave?"

"To-morrow morning," curtly said the American, slipping the document in his passport case.

"Can you be at your rooms at three this afternoon?" anxiously said Gorlitz. "My own are on the same floor."

Wardlawe hesitated—there was both resentment and suspicion in his defiant glance.

Opening his monogram-covered silver case, Gorlitz lit a huge paper tube and, with his blue eyes beaming behind the protecting mask of his glasses, quietly handed Wardlawe an open cablegram.

The American sprang to his feet in astonishment as he read the words, "Major Wardlawe leaves at once for St. Petersburg; see him immediately." The signature "Ixion" concluded the mystification.

"How do you know"—— the American began.

But, Gorlitz quickly stopped him with a warning gesture!

He leaned over and whispered: "Walls have ears, especially in San Francisco. I have fourteen subordinates here—all of them spies! Shall I come to your rooms at three? I am the Western American agent of the Amoor Navigation Company, only second to the head at St. Petersburg, for our Minister at Washington only acts as an aid to me!"

The Major silently handed back the telegram. "I will be there at three!" he muttered, and then mechanically returned Gorlitz's hand clasp as the bustling official loudly said at the door: "You will find Odessa a very nice place, and there are even several Americans there! I will give you some personal letters!"

On his way downstairs the astonished American murmured, "Lies! Thieves! Frauds! all these foreign officials.

With a quick rebound of conscience he sank back

in the coupé, briefly calling, "To the Bank of California!"

"If any place on earth, any society, can equal San Francisco in duplicity and deviltry, then," amiably finished Major Wardlawe as he stepped out at the bank, "St. Petersburg must be a particularly 'rapid' locality!"

He had not recovered from his astonishment, when five minutes later he stepped out with a London draft for £1,000 folded up in his pocketbook and £500 in Bank of England notes stuffed in his passport case.

On his way back to the hotel he caught a glimpse of the earnest face of Consul-General Gorlitz in active conversation with the Honorable Everett Marsden, as that millionaire ship owner and politician rolled leisurely uptown toward the Union Club for his serene mid-day lunch.

"I wonder if he wished to avoid my gaze," mused Wardlawe, as he descended in the court of the Palace to give Draconian orders as to the inviolability of his soon-to-be-deserted apartments.

"I wonder what Gorlitz is up to with my friend Marsden!" mused the still unsatisfied Wardlawe. "He seemed to shrink away out of my sight.

Placing his valuables temporarily in the hotel safe, Major Wardlawe "laid down the law" to the head clerk, Count Smith, he of the umbrageous whiskers, the benign smile, the phenomenal memory, hiding behind a giant sapphire and diamond cluster scarf-pin, temporarily "out on bail," from Colonel Andrew's Diamond Palace.

"Yes, Major!" sighed the urbane chief clerk of the vast caravansera, "I know! You want your rooms kept inviolate! I will hold Jones responsible; and on your return if there is any meddling I'll clean out the whole force of 'smoked diamonds' up there! I will ring him down now, and order that no human being but himself or 'the office' inspects your apartment. I've my hands full with the ground and parlor floor, and God knows what goes on up there on the sixth."

"Very good, Smith!" laughed Wardlawe. "It does seem strange that, reversing the usual order, the 'tem-

perature' rises in the higher altitudes of your 'truly palatial family resort!'"

The florid German Israelite bowed and smiled his perfunctory approval of a good customer's joke.

"Letters?" he briefly said. "Keep them all!" vigorously remarked the Major.

"Callers?" growled the curious human jackdaw.

"Let them wait!" chuckled Wardlawe with a fine sense of humor.

"Singular fellow, that!" reflected the Major, glancing at the clock and hastening away to the Union Club. "Dresses like a prince—new jewels weekly—daily cravat à la mode—box at Opera—same in all the theaters! Knows every man entitled to a 'desirably located' parlor and bath-room between here, New York, Kandahar, Timbuctoo, London, and Calcutta!"

The simple veteran knew not that the 'jewels' were but portable advertisements of various wily tradesmen, the "Tyrian purple and fine linen," the tribute of unwilling "Schneiders," and that, as to the lighter amusements of life, the Count's motto was "Base is the slave who pays."

The gorgeous Count publicly ignored his wife, a stately and still beautiful Semitic Rachel of majestic appearance, who "came down like the wolf on the fold" and purveyed "rich spoil in ring and gear and hose" to the passionate-hearted Aspasias of that great Vanity Fair, the Palace Hotel of San Francisco.

Swinging up the side street, Major Wardlawe, in five minutes, entered the Union Club and proceeded to a private breakfast room, where "the Chief" merely nodded as Wardlawe entered.

"Any news?" demanded the sole breakfast guest as he viewed his hand, inquiringly noting Wardlawe's graceful declination of the table courtesies.

"This!" calmly said the engineer as he handed the capitalist the brief cablegram.

"Good!" ejaculated the Chief. "And when do you start?"

"To-morrow morning!" answered Wardlawe with an air of relief.

"I'll put Loomis in charge of your affairs here,"

said the Iron King of the Pacific coast. "You will be away at least three months! Do you want anything? You have my full powers, you know! Use my private cable cipher; then only you and I will know of the 'Amoor Navigation Company.'"

"I drew fifteen hundred pounds—Bank of California—left them my sight draft on you, Sir," thoughtfully said Wardlawe. "I am anxious to get out of the State!"

"Why so?" quickly said Sterling Mott, wheeling his chair and catching the note of Wardlawe's voice.

"In the ten years of my engagement with you, Mr. Mott," slowly said the veteran, "I have never sought to pry into your designs! I know that you have extended your business from China and Australia to South Africa, and even Europe; that the Rockies, the Cordilleras, the Andes, Alaska and the Arctic echo the sound of your steam whistles; but it's only fair to say that others are on the track of your Amoor Navigation Company's affairs!"

Mott bounded from his chair and quickly grasped his general agent's hands, while he cried, "Tell me at once all! Be sure that you forget nothing!"

In five minutes Mott sank back relieved, when the Major had recounted all of Gorlitz's strange persistency, even to his uptown carriage ride with Everett Marsden.

"And this meddler comes to me at three o'clock!"

Striding up and down the room, a compact, manly figure at fifty—calm-faced, gray-eyed, with a boyish smile and a collegian's mustache, the Iron King wrestled long with the problem.

"I cannot make it out! Consul-General Gorlitz is a man who will not be easily shaken off! You must 'stand pat' and listen to him! Quietly ignore all knowledge of the Amoor Navigation Company. Just tell him that you are going to St. Petersburg to do some expert work in high calculations for projected public constructions, the character or locality of which you know nothing. Everett Marsden is all right, Gorlitz is not! And yet, he is a fellow of unerring sagacity! He smells out a good thing and wants some of it, with

the true hunger of a Russian official. I will warn Marsden! You must simply stand off this Russian wolf Gorlitz! See here, I will take the night boat for Sacramento and meet you there on your train and go up as far as Reno. I wish to look over the machinery on the Comstock. So I will have your last report, and Gorlitz cannot suspect our conference!"

"True," uneasily said Wardlawe, "but he will set the whole official pack on me in St. Petersburg! I never can escape the chase of those tireless wolves!

"As you have told me, I have business with no one but Baron Knorp, Governor-General of the Trans-Baikal, and the Count Nicholas Ignatieff! Then, one or both of these men must have posted Gorlitz, for he showed me Ignatieff's own cipher signature, a signature which both Tolstoi and Loris Melikoff have failed to probe, by the Grand Duke Nicholas' special favor.

"Only these two or General Michael Annenkoff could have betrayed us to Gorlitz! And if we cannot trust to our new friends, where are we,"

Five minutes of self-questioning brought Sterling Mott's ready genius into active operation. "There is something hidden under the surface here! I must see both the Senators and Marsden! The latter is in my lodge and commandery, and he will hold nothing back.

"I have it! Our Russian friends may be playing 'au large,' as the Frenchman would say, I will send all my letters to you sealed, in the dispatch bag, to our Minister at St. Petersburg.

"Paul Kurtz, our First Secretary, is our local agent there. You will get all my orders, papers, cablegrams and letters through Kurtz. I will cable to him from Sacramento, and the two Senators will telegraph to Marshall Jewell, our Minister. Kurtz will have orders to aid and protect you in every way. You have my carte blanche; and now say nothing to any one about the Amoor Navigation Company, save to Count Ignatieff and Baron Knorp.

"Deal with them singly. If there is any need for joint action, call in Kurtz, who will show you my full written instructions to him on your demand. Yours

are in your head, and Kurtz will be ordered not to dissent when you decide; so you are two against the two Russians. Remember, you are to sign no papers. Both the Russians know how to get my assent and that of my associates to confirm your local decision.

"So let none of Gorlitz's wiles, none of Ignatieff's or Knorp's outside intrigues move you a hair!

"If they wish you to go anywhere with them, go to the ends of the earth, reporting to me in cipher. Jewell, our Minister, will have orders to protect you and to put your ciphers through.

"Remember, he knows nothing of the Amoor Navigation Company. He only acts at the bidding of the two Senators!"

"Very good," quietly said Major Wardlawe. "My mind is now at ease. I have only your clear directions to follow. I only wish that you had an abler instrument."

"Don't mention that, Wardlawe!" heartily said the Iron King. "We are on the eve of a tremendous upheaval! I know that, in fifty years, London, San Francisco, New York and some port on the Yellow Sea—probably Port Arthur—will be the four marts of all around the world trade.

"China may be dragged down or else violently decrepitate.

"But, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, will be relieved of the British commercial yoke of Melbourne, Calcutta and Hongkong.

"Japan will compete on the sea with England, and Russia, with Annenkoff's railway, will soon absorb the heart of China while the other foreign nations are nibbling away at the coast line."

"And, the Amoor Navigation Company?" smilingly said Wardlawe.

"'Time and I,' said William the Silent," remarked Mott with vigor.

"In five years we will be building vast battleships in the National Works; our Yankee machinery, with American railway supplies, will soon feed the enormous Asian and Siberian trade! There is coal, gold—

everything in Nature's treasury to be unlocked, far above the junction of the Shilka and the Arguin.

"Our own works now use three thousand men; in fifteen years the force will be five to eight, and in twenty-five, an army of ten or twelve.

"The whole of Alaska and Northern Siberia is a gold mine! The interior wealth of Manchuria and Northern China is measureless! Even our own plans must wait on conquests to come!

"The American flag will yet dominate the middle Pacific, while the Japanese and Russians rule the Northern; and England will be squeezed back in India and confined to holding on to Hongkong.

"So go and meet your Russian bear! Humor him! Do not quarrel with him!

"He may have caught at the fringe of our secret purposes; but you yourself, do not even dream what the 'Amoor Navigation Company' is or may be!

"Ignatieff and Knorp will deliver to you the signed and sealed contracts, of which, as to the lettering and detail, Paul Kurtz is to be the judge.

"He has been twelve years on the Neva as Secretary of Legation, and they cannot delude him!

"You are right! Get swiftly, silently, safely away, and beware of betraying yourself on the voyage! It might even be dangerous.

"There may be some elasticity in Knorp and Ignatieff's ideas. They can use Gorlitz as a pawn, not as an equal, for Ignatieff only dreams of pulling down Tolstoi as the new Czar's Minister of the Interior and becoming dictator again! He is the uncompromising foe of 'la Dolgourouki,' the sweet way to the heart of the new Czar, Alexander III.; a man who has not forgotten his own outraged mother, an empress buried as a neglected beggar, only a worn out human soul!"

The clang of the telephone called Sterling Mott away, and so master and man shook hands.

"I am armed against the Bear," contentedly said Major Wardlawe.

"Strange," he mused as he slowly returned to the Palace. "Here is a diversity of human gifts.

"Sterling Mott is a general of industries, a man

whose victories of peace demand all the nerve, skill and organizing power of the great general.

"Unknown as a politician, avoiding theoretical discussions, he has reached out to grasp the four quarters of the globe in enterprises which prove that America is soon to wear the iron crown and sway the steel sceptre of the world, and that she will resistingly assail the world's markets.

"A Richelieu of the technical arts is this same human steam engine.

"On the other hand, Everett Marsden, his friend, evidently his secret backer here, is the merchant prince, the man who deals, the one who grasps at the 'unearned increment.'

"And lands, ships, franchises, trade, the spoils of sea and shore, drift his way easily, while laurel after laurel—politically—drops upon his head.

"Governor and Senator—both soon to be!

"And with two Senators and one Minister to Russia as their mute agents, what vast powers may not be locked up in the shadowy Amoor Navigation Company, an enterprise whose franchise only needs the seal of the Czar of a hundred millions, the ruler of thirty nations, whose business drags in a mighty noble, and an ex-Dictator as mere agents.

"What lurks behind this elastic veil? At any rate, my own task is easy! 'Straight and sweet my pathway lies!'

"Only to do my duty, guard my own secrets and fulfill Mott's orders when I get them!

"As for protection, with Jewell and his First Secretary I will be 'free of the town.'"

Slowly ascending to his rooms, Walter Wardlawe sat down to await the arrival of the wily Consul-General.

The bright afternoon sun had driven away the morning mists, and long he stood with reverent hand, lifting the veil which hid Isabel Wardlawe's vanished face from the eyes of the curious.

"God be with you, my lost darling!" he whispered, as if he could invoke her shadowy presence.

"What is life but a voyage from nothing to no-

where! No more sunlight for me! It is only the long march, the few last stages and then a soldier's rest, until the Great Reveille!"

Proud and silent, Wardlawe hid his loyal heart from all men; yea, and from most women, too, in this golden seething maelstrom of the Occidental City.

He veiled the beloved picture again reverently, murmuring the words of an old love lament:

"Shall I take comfort! Dost thou live"
"A spirit, though afar,"
"With a deep hush about thee, like"
"The stillness round a star?"

"'Fais ce que dois!' My old motto! I must go on to the end!" he murmured, starting as a loud knock aroused him.

From the hand of a blue-coat messenger lad he took a telegram:

"———— ————. Dine with me this evening. Bohemian Club. Imperative. Seven o'clock. Do not fail."

The signature, "Everett Marsden," quickly decided him.

"Answer?" demanded the shock-headed lad. "I'm to return."

"Say I will be there," briefly replied Wardlawe, who had mentally decided to throw his pen away.

He was standing gloomily, gazing out of the window, wondering if the acute Gorlitz was trying to trap him through the merchant prince, when the bustling Russian rang the bell.

"So, we are alone! You are sure?" remarked Dimitri Gorlitz, already busy with that infernal cigarette case, perpetually throwing people off their guard with its wilderness of fantastic golden monograms affixed to the work of Outchinikoff.

"We are!" quietly remarked the American with a scant pretense of hospitality.

"See here, Major Wardlawe!" frankly cried the keen-witted official. "I can see that you distrust me; that you consider me only a prying busybody."

The Major paused in his walk and drew up a chair.

"I come to prove to you the negative," boldly declared the Consul-General. "I have long since learned that the easiest way to mystify people is to tell them the truth! This world is only a mart of lies! Now I am going to astonish you. It matters not how or why I happen to be connected with the Amoor Navigation Company. You cannot break down my defenses, nor can I conquer your reserve.

"Perhaps the scope of that company to-day is unknown to both of us.

"Perhaps even the leading men here are blinded. I wish no confidences! I came here to tell you that your life is in danger from the very moment that you start, if you betray yourself, as an agent of the company."

Dimitri Gorlitz laughed as Wardlawe started.

"So your masters have told you this already! Well, I repeat it, for my own sake—our interests lie together—mine is not a pecuniary one," he said with a forcible dignity.

"Listen! Here we are in the middle of January. England and Russia were never as near their final war as now, a war which will end either in England losing India or, in the wreck of the Russian Empire.

"I know that you speak French, 'not, that of Stratford-atte-Bowe.'

"Be sure that you are not mistaken for an Englishman in Russia! You may be quietly assassinated or languish unknown in a prison. Take no English books, nothing to betray you. Speak French only, or if you cannot avoid it, German," he added with a grimace of disgust, "although you do not look like a 'kauffman.'

"In St. Petersburg let Count Ignatieff or Baron Knorp choose your every associate, man or woman, save those selected by Paul Kurtz. Dear old Marshall Jewell is only a figurehead; he is steeped in leather! Let him alone!"

Wardlawe gazed helplessly at this friendly tormentor.

"This is some wild dream!" he murmured.

"Only too true!" briskly said Gorlitz, attacking his second papyrus.

"I wish that the fight could be deferred till we have tied China to us with a rope of steel.

"In twenty years our navy will be tripled—we will have the Siberian Railway, Annenkoff's last dream of conquest; and then, we can snap our fingers at the British Lion!"

The gallant Consul-General airily kissed his finger-tips to an imaginary Queen Victoria.

"She fancies herself the Kaisar-i-Hind! Wait! Only wait!"

"There is no opium in those cigarettes?" quietly demanded the Major.

"Do not trifle!" said Gorlitz, in an earnest voice. "It is because your life is valuable to Russia, to this strange company, that I warn you! There are English agents here, spies everywhere—men who would murder you when we need you most. You are to pass through England—a mistake!

"You should have gone by the French Line. See the yawning gulf now! As soon as the snows melt there will be a terrific struggle for the Pamirs! You may not know the 'Roof of the World!' General Komaroff is down there with eighteen thousand men and sixty guns ready to drive the English out of the thirty thousand square miles between the Hindu Kush, the Himalaya, the Kuen-lun and the Tian-Shan Mountains.

"Fenced in between Afghanistan, East Turkestan, China and Turkestan, it is the gate to India, China and Siberia. There, among mountains from six to twenty-five thousand feet high, we will meet England, and even now, fight her to a finish, to prevent an English control of this 'place of arms.'

"We can take it whenever we wish to. We have the railroad to Merv and Tashkend, with eighty thousand men ready to pour in.

"England will growl; yet we will not recede! Komaroff has the Czar's own orders, and all over the whole world Russian and English secret agents are now fighting to defeat each other's plans.

"So you will see perhaps both England and Russia in war time!

"Now, as you risk your life first as a Russian agent in England and later, as an English spy in Russia, I bid you to beware.

"Be ruled only by Ignatieff and Knorp! Prudence will take you safely through England, with silence added.

"In Russia, distrust all men, more especially, all women!" he laughed.

"No, I am not unpatriotic. I am a Siberian, born in Tomsk, and have passed my whole official life in China and Japan.

"But, such traveling divinities as I have met, until transferred here, lead me to believe that the Russian woman is the most delightful devil incarnate in the world, always excepting the Polish Delilahs."

"And, the Amoor Navigation Company?" fervently said Wardlawe.

"I thought that we were not to speak of that!" archly replied Gorlitz. "You see, I will let you down easily. Ring for a bottle of champagne—'vin brut.' I am preserving you for this company's purposes, a concern about which I neither know nor care.

"Circumstances, not inclination, make us friends. I am taking every desperate means to cripple England in the case of this war, which finds us unready.

"But we will meet them! Mark me, England will only growl and retire! Komaroff is our fiercest fighter. England pokes the lion's paw out under the cover of the Afghans. Komaroff will cut the tribes and their secret backers to pieces.

"We are in for a nasty row, and yet, our strongest weapons are our secret ones. You remember the Treaty of Paris? Russia has many reserved means of attacking the mistress of the seas!"

The arrival of "Handsome Jones" with the Perrier-Jouèt "brut" caused Dimitri Gorlitz to sink the sage in the bon-vivant.

When the bumpers were finished the Consul-General hastily lit another of his seductive tubes.

"I am off—dinner and the opera. Ah! I forgot!

You are not a lady's man. Such women here! What fire! Sweet ardent souls! Russian and Pole blended in their devil may care jollity!

"Remember, don't be astonished at a war crisis! But, we will hold to the Pamirs! It is so written in the stars. And, I may see you later on the Neva. You may linger there. Remember, only use the French tongue in our Russian territory. In case of trouble, telegraph in French to Count Nicholas Ignatieff, Moika 21, St. Petersburg. He will at once smooth your pathway.

"He is an intellectual giant. Baron Knorp is only 'means to an end,' Ignatieff's harvester, for, like all great men—Wellington, Napoleon, Frederick, Cæsar—Ignatieff is avaricious."

With a quaint Muscovite half bow, Dimitri Gorlitz bustled down the hallway humming an air from "Perichole," the red gleam of his papyrus lighting his way.

"Tireless wolf," cried Wardlawe, dropping into a chair.

"This is a strange visit! There is not even any public intimation of this international tension. And he never even mentioned Marsden!"

Major Wardlawe smothered an unworthy desire to convict Gorlitz of lying.

"No, he was luxuriating—for once in his life—in telling the truth. There was conviction in his very eyes." And he strangely corroborates Sterling Mott's suggestion of danger.

"Marsden! No! There is no connection between these men. What can his business be?"

Before the Major donned his dinner dress the alert Jones had packed the trunk and portmanteau which constituted Wardlawe's whole traveling outfit.

"Nothing there to betray the American or Englishman," he proudly concluded, "save this eight-inch edition of international law of 44 caliber according to Smith & Wesson. I will buy me a few hats, a traveling pelisse and a bundle of yellow novels in Paris—just to give a local flavor."

"Now, Jones!" sternly commanded Wardlawe.

"Herein fail not! Breakfast for me here at seven, the baggage door and carriage at eight. You will go over the Bay with me to find that yellow double eagle which is now soaring about Oakland wharf for you.

"On my return you shall be dealt with according to your deserts."

"All your maps, drawings, plans, books—the whole caboodle,' Sir—will be in tip top order. I am the man now to blame if anything goes wrong. There'll be no 'song and dance' business in these rooms!" grinned the expectant valet.

With a sigh Walter Wardlawe left the rooms which for ten years had been his atelier as general traveling agent of the great National Works.

With a fine reticence even the heads of some departments at the National did not know the man whom Sterling Mott sent out over the world to hazard millions in those great capitalistic combats in which thousands of distant toilers are mere pawns in the hands of the directing generals of the modern army of Midas.

"Now for the Bohemian Club!" mused the Major.

"Everett Marsden has not the cool, masterly way of Mott, nor the inky cuttlefish slyness of my Mephisto Dimitri Gorlitz, but he 'hath a way,' like Shakespeare's sweetheart—a way all his own—to judiciously economize the truth, on occasion.

"Will he, too, feed me with half disclosures?"

The veteran gaily scorned all possibility of entanglement, as he sought the long low rooms on Bush street, sacred to the memory of Colonel John Cremorny, still lit up by the magic of Robert Louis Stevenson's mystic smile, and later, irradiated by Rudyard Kipling's caustic wit.

"Going over the water?" cried Robert Grogan, the cheery chief of a millionaire banking clan, seizing upon Wardlawe as he entered the vestibule.

"I saw you buying your tickets, and the steamer agent told me you had telegraphed for the best cabin on the 'Aurania.' My sister Frances is going over with you."

Stifling his surprise, Wardlawe gaily accepted,

when Grogan, after the "sacrifice to the owl"—the pouring out of libations—sat down to dash off a half dozen introductory letters to "our fellows in London."

It occurred later to the secret agent to remember that the high-spirited Grogan was the "fidus Achates" on the Pacific coast of Parnell, Michael Davitt, Tom Power O'Connor, Redmond, and other men of brilliant talent but doubtful loyalty to the "meteor flag of England."

And yet, as Everett Marsden modestly pushed his way through the crowd, Wardlawe pocketed the letters with hearty thanks and a brotherly adieu as Marsden led the way to a private dining room.

In the happy halls of Bohemia, the grave, preoccupied face of the multifarious millionaire Everett Marsden was a foil to the happy-go-lucky expression of the gathered free lances of the Pacific coast.

And yet, all men crowded around Marsden, who had "arrived" at the pinnacle of financial and political success by the old fashioned methods of industry, economy and sterling character.

The path from being "cabin boy" of a Maine fishing smack to the triple honor of millionaire, mighty ship owner, Governor and self-succeeding Senator, is a long one, a weary ascent.

And so, Wardlawe studied the cheery face of the dark-haired and dark-eyed man, whose soft voice, simple greeting and affability made him a general favorite.

Strangely enough, Marsden's warm friendships were all distributed among men, for he distrusted the dolls of Fashion, finding them too frequently padded with sawdust and other more dangerous things.

At this dinner hour—"blest truce with daily cares"—the rooms over the old market were crowded with the "best and gravest" of the Cosmopolis of the Pacific. Financiers, lawyers, doctors, political leaders and mining magnates, with great merchants, thronged this neutral ground where a "truce of God" reigned under the unblinking eyes of the club owls. There, solid men fondly fancied themselves the best—potent of name and plethora of purse—while the

"bravest"—were the amorphous squads of explorers, adventurers, artists, journalists, "rising writers," men of the two "services," pioneers and the other bold, self-reliant natures who had carved out the Empire of the West with no other reward than scars and the marks of many "scapes by flood and field."

These warm-hearted souls thronged around the cheery ex-Governor, as he gravely took Wardlawe's arm.

Finally Marsden escaped, by a general libation to that ancient god Bacchus, whose temples are never shut and whose worship needs no fiery Savaronola to gain proselytes.

After the manly chorus of "How!" Marsden, nodding to the grave and reverend seigniors, pocketed his invitation to the next High Jinks and led Wardlawe into the passage filled with cubby hole dining rooms, where affairs of vast moment were often adjusted over the Chambertin.

Flimsily thrown up to secure an alleged privacy, these thin partitions but partly separated men whose sly schemes often intersected in their careening orbits.

The grave butler bowed Everett Marsden and his guest into No. 2, as the capitalist said: "I fancy there is no club in the world as frankly Bohemian as this same Palace of the Owls."

Wardlawe started as he caught the direct glance of a sturdy man, in tweeds, entering alone the compartment No. 1.

The old soldier days came back to the Major. "That man has served," he mused.

"Sized me up with a single comprehensive glance!"

But, he soon forgot all his surroundings, in Marsden's grave concern over the business in hand.

"I have taken the liberty of asking the steward to serve us his very best dinner, with his own selection of wines, to gain time, and so," laughed Marsden, "we can only do as Peter—when the cloth was let down, "Arise, slay—and eat!"

"Now, I feel that I owe you an apology for stealing you last evening, Major Wardlawe; but I must ask you to do a favor for me, which I would not entrust

to any other living man. You go direct to St. Petersburg?"

Feeling that Destiny was sweeping him on, Walter Wardlawe quietly nodded as he listened to Marsden's sonorous and penetrating voice.

Both men would have risen in alarm, could they have seen the occupant of "No. 1" crouching beside the panels on the other side of the flimsily set up factory panels, listening to Marsden's regularly recurrent speech.

"In the interest of the Amoor River Steam Navigation Company," softly said Marsden, fixing his dark eyes upon the astonished Wardlawe.

"Did Sterling Mott tell you this?" gravely whispered the Major.

The soldier's heart was raging with a hatred of Consul-General Gorlitz's cool betrayal.

"Yes!" said Marsden. "And I wish to trust you in a matter of the gravest importance, Major; one that must remain sealed in our own hearts, because the gravest events may depend upon your prudence!"

The oyster soup and fish courses were served before Wardlawe, anxiously watching the adroit garçon, gloomily replied, in a silence which was maintained even in "No. 1," where the solitary occupant sat with his chair drawn close to the thin partition.

"It seems to me, Mr. Marsden, that I am not free to do anything of moment without Sterling Mott's orders or approbation," gloomily answered Wardlawe.

"Just the man who must know nothing of it!" cried Marsden in a genuine alarm.

"The Amoor Navigation Company may assume Protean shapes! Mott is the autocrat of the technical future of these vast plans to open the basin of the Amoor, but the company may take a hand in matters which may wreck an empire or shape the future of Asia and contest the control of the sea! I will say no more. I dare not! Did Gorlitz call on you to-day?"

"Yes!" moodily said Wardlawe, while the shame-faced man on the other side of the partition gripped his heart to still his heavy breathing.

"When the events he speaks of happen the Pacific

Ocean will be clouded with privateers and England's commerce ruined!"

"Ah!" gasped Wardlawe. "The Treaty of Paris!"

"Precisely!" calmly said Everett Marsden, all his commercial keenness showing in his face. "The Amoor Company may need a fleet of ocean steamers. I control the only one available on the whole Pacific. Spain, Mexico, Russia and the United States did not abolish privateering!"

The velvet-footed servant entered—a Deus ex machina—and discreetly spread the next service with a critical eye at the half-emptied wine bottles, his own future harvest.

"What am I to do for you? Loyal, always, to Sterling Mott and the National Works?" demanded Wardlawe.

"Only to guard with your life, a packet of sealed papers addressed for mere safety to Paul Kurtz, First Secretary of the American Legation at St. Petersburg. I have had them sealed officially by Gorlitz, so you are safe from annoyance once in Russia, as far as opening them goes!

"But these priceless papers must not leave your body! I dare trust to no one else. It is vital! Millions may be won or lost! States saved by this!" earnestly cried Marsden. "You have carte blanche to name your reward; for expenses, absolutely a carte blanche!"

His voice was pitiful in its pleading.

A helpless millionaire!

"Why don't you send them through the Legation? Marshall Jewell is under your control. You own the Senators! You can make a fence of Senators about you," said Wardlawe.

"Because our Government must be kept free of England's Alabama taint!

"These documents must never pass through the hands of an American official! You are to deliver them to Count Ignatieff himself or, at his bidding, to Admiral Chestakoff, the Minister of Marine of Russia.

"No receipts—nothing—only get them at once to either of these men!

"It's only fair to say your life would be endangered as far as the Russian frontier, should any one know of the Amoor Navigation Company's agent!

"Beyond that, Gorlitz's fiery patriotism protects you! He is the sole American agent in the West, of De Giers, and rumor has it that he is the son of a former Governor-General of all Siberia—his mother a Russian countess exiled as a girl conspirator, in 'thirty-three! He to-day is England's bitterest, most dangerous secret foe.

"Now, Wardlawe, will you do this for me?"

The Major bowed his head in ascent as the plovers and champagne were served.

"What will be your recompense?" said Wardlawe when they were alone. "I wish it to be magnificent!"

"I am like Simon Cameron's ideal honest man," slowly rejoined Major Wardlawe. "A fellow who stays bought when you have bought him once! The National owns me.

"Let this be an outside favor. I may some day ask you for some steamboat passes for some of my old soldiers. All right, I'm your man!"

"Then," said Marsden, when the crushing hand grasp had ended and a glass of champagne sealed the one-sided bargain, "I'll bring the papers to your train myself at Oakland to-morrow morning.

"I will put them in two packets, so they will balance in your breast pockets.

"Gorlitz comes to my house to-night with his seals and paraphernalia."

"Liar!" mused Wardlawe.

"He said dinner and the opera, with a 'rosebud girl!' The normal man is a phenomenal liar!"

"Full instructions for your guidance will be sent in Mott's private cipher to you by me through Gorlitz, who will get the papers, in his own way, to Count Ignatieff. You know all the dangers now. I will see that, willy nilly, your reward reaches you later. Remember, silence! secrecy! discretion!"

"All right," laughed Wardlawe. "My nerve is faultless, if my brains only hold out!"

"You!" gaily answered Marsden when they de-

parted, with scant attention to Chef Vefour's "Timbale à la Petit Trianon."

"I know you need all your time," gratefully said Marsden, at the door of the little den.

"Steal away! I will put in a half an hour in the club parlors to throw off any suspicions.

"Then I go straight to Oakland! Gorlitz is at my house in waiting now! For I knew I could count on your gallantry!"

While Wardlawe was wondering over this strange mission on his way to the Palace, a red-faced Briton emerged from compartment "No. 1," having finished his dinner with a stiff brandy and water.

"I must have a shy at this fellow," he murmured.

"I'm no d——d assassin, but hang me if I don't detain him a month or thwart him! I'll have him followed to the Czar's own dinner table if needs be! Allan Law is the very man!"

CHAPTER II.

BERRY OF THE ROYAL ARTILLERY.

As scrupulous, as cheery old Count Considine, as "to being first on the ground," Major Wardlawe took a ferryboat the next morning a half hour before the regular run.

His last evening hours had been devoted to casing and packing his drawings and projets and prudently sealing up all his drawers and rolls.

By some premonition he took down his old army bowie knife as he made his morning toilet, and slipped the Cossack loop of the cord over his neck and one shoulder.

"A pistol misses fire," mused Wardlawe; "a knife never does, and few care to face it."

The well-worn chamois note-case hung around his neck, concealed his "sinews of war," and the "international law" of Smith & Wesson was easily reachable under his traveling jacket.

It was a bright morning, and Wardlawe's spirits

rose under the influence of the unrivaled panorama of the Bay of San Francisco.

Late roués and early toilers crowded this matutinal "early bird" boat as it swept on past Yerba Buena with the "faithful Jones" in charge of Wardlawe's pet black bag with its hand-made double brass clasps and patent locks.

The valet was thinking only of the bright twenty-dollar piece awaiting him and of the greater "reward of merit" on Major Wardlawe's return.

At the last moment, before entering the ferry, Wardlawe had seen in a slop shop the very thing he desired—a buckskin undervest, with capacious pockets plentifully supplied with flaps, buttons, buckles and strings! "That is the very thing I need for my mysterious papers," was the soldier's prompt decision, and a five-dollar gold piece left Mr. Abraham Levy bowing and scraping.

"Turned inside out, with this I can defy the neatest 'grafter' in the profession," mused the Major as the train at last sped up the long mole.

There had been much "local merriment" when from Marsden's splendid carriage were unearthed several hampers, turned over to the smiling Pullman car porter.

"Enough cigars and 'tonics' to last me to Bagdad or Bassora," cried the Major when Everett Marsden beckoned him into the close carriage.

"Here you are!" he hoarsely whispered.

"Two sealed packages! Gorlitz has made them 'Kosher' for the Russian inquisitors. Remember, they are never to leave your body, your own eyes, till Chestakoff gets them. A million in betterments depends on your fidelity, and perhaps, a nation's existence on your promptness."

"If aught happens?" whispered Wardlawe.

"Destroy them only if death clutches you, at the very last!" gravely said the capitalist. "As for interference or delay, cable me direct. The whole power of the United States will free you at once.

"Use money like water if needs be. Wells, Fargo

& Co.'s bank in London has my orders to pay any drafts on me personally which you draw.

"And Gorlitz sent a cipher cable of three hundred words last night. Once in Russia you will be treated like a king!

"Only," he solemnly adjured, "Ignatieff and Chestakoff are the only two men to whom you must talk. Kurtz is your slave, not your go-between. He knows absolutely nothing, save to deliver to you intact any mail. But Gorlitz will send all tidings direct to Ignatieff. Use the Mott cipher and let Count Nicholas have the letters all sealed triply with your private seal and corded strongly! The Russians are as sly as the Germans in letter opening. Now, go! There's your whistle!"

"I will keep this trust with my life!" solemnly said Wardlawe as he sprang into his car, only to see Everett Marsden's team placidly trotting on the ferry-boat.

The faithful Jones had decided to "ride up the road" two or three stations to arrange his master's section, having pocketed the double eagle with a golden smile.

In some amusement Major Wardlawe now observed the efforts of the two conductors to eject a burly Englishman who, with a smart evil-looking valet and a mountain of luggage, occupied the central aisle.

Loud grew the tumult as the train approached the main land, while ladies craned their necks and the dogged Briton, like Ajax, "defied the lightning" and even the autocratic S. P. R. R. Co.

"There's nothing here for you! Everything sold out! You must go forward to the day cars!" growled the conductor, nippers in hand, and with his eyes on the thronging brakemen.

Entrenched upon his luggage, the sturdy Englishman put up his eyeglass while the "officials" stormed and swore.

"There is an empty drawing-room!" quietly observed Major Wardlawe when hostilities were about to open actively.

Tipping his "fore and aft" tweed helmet, the Briton dropped his eyeglass, produced a bulging pocket-

book, and the "oil of gladness" was soon poured on the troubled waters.

The alert valet hurled his master's luggage into the dark hole usually reserved for "bridal couples!" and then Peace spread her snowy wings.

Some remarks about a "blasted country" were soon wafted from a half open door, where the son of Brittania sat puffing a pipe of phenomenal chubbiness, filled with a "mixture" evidently compounded in Hades.

"Where have I seen that face?" mused Wardlawe, now intent only upon the two packages resting in his breast pockets.

"I can leave the train at Sacramento and don my buckskin armor after that. I am safe as long as life and sanity stay with me," mused the old soldier, not wondering now why these same papers had not been sent on by express by some bank or other fiduciary agent.

"I seem to carry Cæsar and his fortunes," he decided, his spirits rising as the train flew along to Niles' station.

Here it was that "Handsome Jones" took his smiling departure, having arranged the traveler's private supplies, and with the deft freemasonry of the colored race "squared the Major as far as New York" for his master's fame as a "liberal giver of tips" diligently preceded him from change to change.

"You kin trust your rooms to be all right, sah!" eloquently pleaded Jones. "I've all the keys. Lena is a 'perfect lady,' and any 'conversaziones,' small 'pahties' or other little affairs will be held in Mr. Van Rensselaer's rooms 'foh the future.' He's a young gentleman huntin' a rich gal wife, an' he's no time for housekeeping."

"All right, Jones," affably remarked the Major. "See that you fall not by the way! Take this ten dollars to Lena, which I forgot to give her. Tell her if you betray me, I'll return and pulverize you both. My chattels are henceforth sacred to myself. My room is to be a hermit's cave. No more side-combs, poker decks, powder puffs or, 'horresco referens,' empty

whisky bottles! Drink my own good stuff; don't bring that corner grocery poison in there! Yet, drink with discernment and moderation! It is a good servant's lawful spoil of war."

Lena, the sleek Venus of upper servantdom, dove-eyed and yet vicious as a panther, later received the "stern commands," but not, alas! not the ten dollars! Handsome Jones was something of a genius in a small way—money never passed him!

The delightful lethargy of travel soothed Major Wardlawe as the clicking wheels rolled on over a steel pathway, of which the engineer knew nearly every vista to New York, three thousand miles away.

He only awakened from his reverie to extricate the Englishman from a fruitless battle of words with the recalcitrant and profane "newsboy," a fellow of the baser sort.

"Fancy now!" cried the Briton. "He claimed he had no Bradshawe, d'ye know! Must, by Jove—must have a Bradshawe everywhere—here, you show it up kindly. 'Pacific Coast Railway Guide,' only another name, sir, for Bradshawe.

As Wardlawe nodded off in a new nap, he recalled this energetic tourist's face.

"Yes!" he mused. "At the Bohemian Club! The party who 'sized me up!' I'll see if he is as expert a liar as Gorlitz! It's hardly to be expected though! Dimitri Gorlitz is the limit, like 'Three-Star Hennessy,' the 'non plus ultra' of liars! This man is probably only an amateur!"

In which comforting conclusion Major Wardlawe dropped off to sleep, ignorant of the keen glances of Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Seaforth Berry of the Regiment of the Royal Artillery, the pride and boast of England, the star of Great Britain's forces, until a stern conviction of its inferior armament was forced upon the public mind by Krueger's Gallic experts handling the magnificent modern guns of Creuzot.

"I must devise a plan to hoodwink this frank-faced Yankee officer," mused Colonel Berry. "How to account for my presence in America requires cool and properly adjusted lying. But, the cards are with me!

Five pounds to this pretty colored maid Lena has given me Major Walter Wardlawe's whole history; and Consul William Lane Booker's card at the Bohemian Club has perhaps made my fortune.

"Strange that chance should throw in my way what all the British Consul's spying on Dimitri Gorlitz could not effect.

"That a thin partition should release me from playing the 'society man' and chasing the Russian Consul-General from Sausalito to Del Monte, from the 'White Sulphur' to Santa Barbara, and from Menlo Park to every gilded labyrinth of Nob Hill's redwood palaces.

"And Sam Norris and I must have those same papers; a ten minutes' shy at them would mean a C.B. for me!

"If we cannot trick him, then Allan Law's the only man in Her Majesty's Secret Service who can!"

And so, while Major Wardlawe slept in peace, with a veteran's eye half open, the man who had followed Wardlawe to the sixth floor of the Palace and bought the contents of Lena's rattle brain, as to the sleeper's whole surroundings, after a night's lodging, this adroit globe-trotter—patriotism in his manly heart—swore to circumvent the schemes of the only man on the Pacific coast feared by the now excited English, the sagacious Dimitri Gorlitz, brooding behind his eyeglasses and concealing his infinite finesse by his loud "society racket" and "barbarian" love of pleasure.

"Can Gorlitz be connected with these London dynamite explosions?" mused Berry, of the Artillery. "It would be just like the Russian Bear to stir up a row at home for us! Ah! these Irish! As clearly unamalgamated after seven hundred years of conquest, as the Gulf Stream in the chilly Atlantic!

"Ought to ship the whole lot over to Yankee land, where they seem to thrive. Admirable 'hunting country' Ireland would make! A dozen of their leaders have been 'raising funds' in California within the last year.

"I saw this man with Grogan, of the Hibernia Bank, last night. Colonel Robert is a friend and host

of all these Irish chiefs. Perhaps I can complicate this matter! And Grogan gave him a bunch of letters. If I could only delay him, then Scotland Yard would do the rest. We will see. Now he is waking up! I must prepare my lies with a skill, so they will hang together."

Colonel Berry was mystified at Wardlawe's hasty plate of soup at Sacramento, while the calm-eyed Sterling Mott enjoyed a hearty meal.

Fifteen minutes of the half hour wait was devoted to Wardlawe's donning his buckskin armor in a private room.

"Now!" joyfully mused the Major when he had reversed his jerkin with the documents properly secured, "they will have to cut me open like a turtle to get at my fat."

The undervest was laced and belted, and Wardlawe could feel the pressure of the two packages at every movement of his lithe athletic frame.

Coffee and cigars followed, with a stroll up the platform, till Sterling Mott and Wardlawe entered the latter's section.

The great head of the National Works breathed freely.

Major Wardlawe had already decided to keep Everett Marsden's mission a sacred secret.

"Gorlitz!" carelessly said the Major. "He only desired to make it pleasant for me in St. Petersburg, and he has taken some private steps to insure my freedom from many annoyances. He seems to be in confidential relations with some of your principals over there."

Full of "special information," Wardlawe was as coquettish as a newspaper "war correspondent."

"I understand all," quietly said Mott. "Gorlitz has some old romantic story back of his paternity. He wishes to 'sow his wild oats' and then, get into the Diplomatic Corps on a final promotion."

"He is putting in a good crop of the 'oats,'" grimly said the general agent.

"I fancy so," dryly said the dispassionate Iron King. "I understand Monsieur De Giers wishes him

to marry some beautiful American and 'settle down' before the transfer. But, he has his local uses! No man knows the Chinese, the Corean, Asian and Japanese questions better. And, he is a guide-book of Siberia.

"I fancy there is some bar sinister in his birth, or else some dark-eyed Russian dame of rank would have already taken him up and advanced his career. He is a man of wonderful gifts."

"As for the sudden call for you, I had a cipher cablegram last night," whispered Sterling Mott. "They wish to lay out all that coal-handling machinery over at Dui, on Saghalien Island. You remember your plans of last year.

They wish to be able to coal a whole war fleet in twenty-four hours, or a fleet of a hundred transports in a week; and so you may be sent out there at once.

"On your fiscal explanations, your expert testimony alone, the Russian Government will give its final orders. They have had three-foot contour surveys made of the whole regions, exquisite harbor maps, and some hundreds of photographs prepared with samples of all the coal, timber, building materials and all brought to the Neva in readiness for you.

"Wonderful people!" said Wardlawe, deeply relieved at heart.

"So, as this is your special subject, I've nothing to say to you but go ahead. You will have to come back here, to go over to Saghalien surely!" smilingly said Mott when they reached Alta, climbing into the lovely foothills of the Sierras.

"I'll jump off here and examine my iron mines, then go on to Copperopolis and Virginia.

"Telegraph me openly from New York of your departure.

"After that, use the cipher only."

And then, master and man parted with a cheery American halloo of "Take care of yourself!" from the Iron King, who risked three millions of capital in the great projected works on Wardlawe's sole judgment.

"I'd give a thousand pounds for your conversation,"

mused Colonel Henry Seaforth Berry as he easily recognized the great Iron King. "That chap does all the confidential work of the Russian Government here. I wonder if he wishes to sell them a pirate fleet!"

The stout-hearted British soldier sighed, as he thought of the few weeks before the snows would melt on the Pamirs. "It will be a jolly go of a fight or else a backdown out and out, for some one."

And then he returned to his projected "lying," already very fairly skeletonized.

"I think it will hold together," he mused that evening when they ran into the "dark olive depths" of the majestic Sierras pines.

"But I'll ride him with a light hand! Not for a couple of days."

So it was that the fast speeding train had reached the sink of the Humboldt before "Berry of the Artillery" had exchanged visiting cards with "Mr. Walter Wardlawe."

At the end of the second day, Sam Norris, Colonel Berry's cockney valet, was handling the private "supplies," a feast of good things—Marsden's tribute—while the two men chatted shop, in Berry's stateroom.

With a judicious economy of the truth, the American Major only admitted that he had "seen four years of fighting," and yet, loyal and single-hearted, was deeply interested in Henry Seaforth Berry's magnificent pyramidal lie, worthy of the French term "mensonge," a veritable classic work of the lost arts of Ananias and Sapphira, worthy of that sleek Hebrew beauty, Rachel, who lied "to beat the band" in the old patriarchal days.

Berry had "left a yacht at Buenos Ayres," "ridden over the Andes to Valparaiso," "steamed up to San Francisco" with "delays in Mexico."

He "had done the whole State of California"—Yosemite, big trees, the mines and all—even dabbled in "stocks," "passed over the red hot ploughshares" of Californian society, and with a tender twinge here and there, having used up his leave, was now on his way home to the headquarters of the world's greatest

regiment of twenty-one thousand soldiers at Woolwich!

"Had a jolly good time, that's all," concluded the Colonel.

"Know the Eastern States. Oh! Rather!" he frankly agreed.

Berry of the Artillery had sketched out his lying with a free hand, and he frankly acknowledged every bit of the local information gained in his seven months' stay on "secret service" orders.

"It is your d——d inconsistencies that ruin otherwise well constituted lying," mused Berry, "and eagerness—undue eagerness—spoils the best game in the world."

Society beauties, local notables, even the Bohemian Club, sacred to memories of dreamy Charlie Stoddard, and many a "silver-tongued orator," to the august George Bromley and many "good men before Agamemnon," all there, Berry languidly sketched.

"Think I saw you at the Club. Went there to wait for Lane Booker to take a farewell bachelor stirrup cup with me.

And so, over the wines of the astute Marsden, soothed with good tobacco—your great leveller—Wardlawe drifted into an easy travel friendship with Berry of the Artillery.

Concealing his own technical knowledge, Wardlawe soon found that the nonchalant Englishman was a master of his profession, a thorough man of the world, one who had "opened the oyster" with his sword to some purpose.

Berry, though unpretentious, was "good form" in every juncture, well read, an expert linguist, and with many "pearls" to be fished from the deep sea of his phlegmatic calmness.

Sternly adhering to his rule of self-repression, Wardlawe did not even indicate his trans-Atlantic voyage while the two men amused themselves on the train, which had its usual polyglot features of stereotyped peculiarities.

And so, beauty and age, wisdom and folly, care and the light heart jostled as they swung along down past

Green River in that weird kingdom which once was "Brother Brigham's."

Perfectly secure in his own land, feeling the invincibility of his buckskin armor, Major Wardlawe slept behind the worsted curtains of his "section," at peace with all the world, and yet with the heavy knife reachable on its loose cord slung around his neck and shoulders.

So it was, that with a sudden start, he quickly awoke as they were nearing North Platte station, in a terrible midnight storm, as a stealthly hand softly dallied with the fastenings of his buckskin vest.

Wardlawe's slight motion of reaching his knife alarmed the furtive thief.

The soldier had recognized a master touch. His first impulse to clutch the thief's wrist he gave up as useless, for, lying down, it was impossible to use his whole strength.

"I fancy that I will just mark him," was the veteran's next thought as he reflected that a quick jerk might carry away the chamois bag with the fifteen hundred pounds, loosely hung within the vest.

And so, with a deft clutch, he grasped the fore arm of the intruder, and, by chance, drew the keen blade sharply across the back of the thief's hand.

A smothered groan, the slowing of the train at the station, and then, Major Wardlawe leaped out into the empty aisle!

Beyond a trail of blood to the door and the deluge in his berth, there was no sign of the wounded man.

Throwing a rug over his couch, Wardlawe, every fiber tingling with a new alarm, lay pondering until morning.

He had quickly decided to await developments.

And so it was that he was keenly attentive to the passengers at breakfast. No one fathered the secret attempt!

No sign of trouble appeared, and the conductor had been duly silenced.

The long train was under way before Colonel Berry sought his friend with a rueful face.

Vague rumors of some midnight trouble now agitated the whole train.

"Sorry to have to bother you, Major Wardlawe," said the rueful Briton. "Fancy, Sam Norris, a fellow I took up the Nile, a man who has watched my chambers for five long years, has levanted with my dressing-case, eighty pounds in it, my top coat, a watch and my gun case! There's two hundred guineas gone to pot! Is the fool crazy?"

More in sorrow than in anger, the American told of the midnight effort to rob his person.

"Cockney wit," said Berry. "He fancied that he might get your wallet also. What can we do?"

Beyond the blood stains on the floor there was nothing ever recovered of the valet's spoils.

And both grown strangely reticent, the two tourist friends spoke but briefly of the occurrence.

An uneasy feeling at first agitated Wardlawe, who now redoubled every personal precaution.

"I suppose that the beggar has quietly stolen himself rich in three years!" mourned Berry. "I've a good bit of property at home—a bachelor—and this lad had the daily outgo in his hands."

But Wardlawe was easily disarmed by Berry's helplessness. "You'll have to be my banker till I reach New York," the Colonel said. "By luck I had my cheque book in my coat pocket! And you must divide up your toilet supplies, I pray you!"

Keenly alive now to every wink of an eye, Major Wardlawe reached New York with no further necessity to use the "lex talionis."

Telegrams from the "local authorities" had warned Colonel Berry of their ill success in finding the erring Sam Norris. "He will carry my mark, at any rate, for his life," sternly said Wardlawe as the friends separated at the Grand Central Station.

The American went to the Fifth Avenue, the "old reliable," where he promptly placed his whole valuables in the safe. "You'll breakfast at the Astor House with me to-morrow," heartily said Colonel Berry, "as I drive at once to the Consul's. There I am at once all right."

Some strange reluctance caused Wardlawe to conceal his ocean voyage, and he never fathomed Colonel Berry's purposes.

The next day Berry, with graceful politeness, returned the Major's funds and presented the American new toilet articles.

"I'd like to get you once with your feet under the mahogany of the Woolwich mess," heartily cried "Berry of the Artillery." You were my savior on the trip. I wonder where that wicked beggar Norris is?"

Two weeks later a discontented-looking young Englishman, clad in rusty Western "store clothes," called at the English Consulate in New York City and quietly picked up some very interesting letters and a hundred pounds in bank notes.

Few of the local Ganymedes cared whether Sam Norris drank his "bitter beer" with his left hand or not; but the Cockney, with his arm in a sling, did so imbibe for many a long month, after he had reached Colonel Berry's "town chambers" in foggy London, where he objurgated wrathfully all Yankee Majors.

"Beastly cuttin' sneak!" growled the disappointed thief. "An' the old man had promised me five hundred pounds to swipe the two envelopes! I could feel 'em under the beggar's vest, and, by Jove, he had lashed 'em down! Who'd a thought the Yankees sleep with one eye open and a bowie knife in their hands! But he has crippled me for life, and I'll have his life yet—to even that score!"

Tired and weary with a few city commissions, Major Wardlawe never looked to the right or left when he reached the "Aurania," and, thoroughly startled by his overland experience, he sealed and deposited the two packets of papers and his own funds with the purser in the massive safes.

"These are impregnable!" sighed Wardlawe in relief. "And yet, if the ship goes down?" he mused. "Then," he sadly smiled, "Cæsar must send another messenger. I'll go down with them!" He reflected that the English Government had been twice slyly robbed of an official Legation mailbag and other docu-

ments of vital importance, from the steel-lined mail rooms of the liners, and yet he felt safe in his trust.

Sandy Hook was far down astern when, cigar in mouth, Wardlawe paced the deck, recalling every telegram exchanged, every hurried detail of his two days in New York and the few hours passed with a beloved sister.

"No! No!" he finally concluded. "This English officer could not have known of his servant's thieving attempt. I might easily have shot the man dead or grappled him, and he has robbed the Colonel also. The brute threw himself off the train, too, at the risk of his life."

Suddenly the American started back as a well-known voice exclaimed to a swab wielder: 'I say, my man! Look out where you're going, you grampus!'

Glass in eye, with the well known fore and aft on his head, a binocular strapped on, and a red book in his pocket, stood "Berry of the Artillery," whose purse even now contained a telegram from Sam Norris at Omaha.

Major Wardlawe was visibly disconcerted, and he felt himself taken at a disadvantage.

For some new dignity seemed to have settled upon "Berry of the Artillery," rubicund, sturdy, standing with his feet planted wide apart, and now fumbling for the binoculars with which he had directed the fire of his brigaded batteries, four years before, at Tel-el Kèbir.

"Suddenly called over to Woolwich," placidly murmured Berry. "Mysterious explosions are creating wild alarm in London. All 'leave officers' of the Royal Regiment of Artillery are ordered to their posts.

"Great fears for Woolwich, Deptford, Portsmouth and Chatham arsenals.

"Dynamite fellows, crazy Fenian devils can do much harm! Let's have a glass of grog!"

As the "Aurania" plunged along past Fire Island Wardlawe recovered his shaken nerve.

Over the well screwed-down tables in the smoking room the two secret enemies deftly "swopped lies."

Wardlawe was "taking a run over to the Continent to look at the Creuzot works" and "make contracts with Krupp for raw materials for the great National Works at San Francisco."

"That's a fair yarn," mused the Major, "and it gives me freedom of movement."

But the American was outclassed by "Berry of the Artillery," who distantly referred to the death of his uncle, General Griffith Ap-Griffith of Pen-Gryffyth, Penhallon, Wales. "The good old boy left me a tidy sum in the Three Per Cents, and so, I must see my solicitors, as well as go and take possession of his funny old rat hole! By the way, I find that rascal Norris got away with two or three thousand pounds' worth, after all. I forgot I had left all my useless case fittings at home, and the papers and vouchers which he took were invaluable. I suppose that he is laying back for a reward. Will give the case to my London solicitors. But, how did he ever conceive the idea of robbing you?"

Wardlawe swallowed these gilded lies without a gulp and said: "Colonel, I have thought deeply over it. Norris shaved me once or twice and also trimmed my hair. He must have felt the little sack under my singlet, in which I carried some notes. Bank of England notes are the best money to take anywhere. A slight premium all over the world."

"Yes," gravely said the Englishman, "and the dog fancied he only had to cut a tape around your neck to draw the bag away!"

"You are right!" cried Wardlawe. "That explains the presence of the pair of dressing scissors which I found in my bed."

"Funny devils," sighed Berry, "'these' private gentleman's gentlemen. Seymour of the Engineers, an awful swell, had a fellow named Warner. Invaluable, ten years with him, handled everything, even his confidential matters. By Jove! cut his stick at Rome two years ago during the carnival—cleaned all out! Left Seymour on the street with a Pierrot suit on and only a few lire in his pocket!

"Jewels, papers, wardrobe were gone, and a huge

payment on forged drafts was taken up on a letter of credit; then, he disappeared!

"Had the impudence to send Seymour later by mail from America the Chubb's keys of all his private vaults at Milner Castle and to complain that the clothes stolen were not quite a fit."

"It has been a lesson to me!" growled Wardlawe. "I defy any man to rob me now! I would have shot this man but for fear of killing some one in the car. He has only succeeded in becoming 'a man of mark,' that's all. The next midnight robber will drop dead in his tracks! I am armed!"

"Be very careful," kindly said Berry, "as to carrying weapons in the United Kingdom. All strange Americans are now looked on with suspicion, on account of the mysterious dynamite attacks. Poor crazy Irishmen!"

As the "Aurania" shot past the foggy banks Wardlawe dropped into the safety of a shilling whist game and avoided the peevish, nervous "American beauties" cooped up in the great cabins by the wild winter weather.

An uneasiness which he could not defined possessed him, however, and he thrust the bundle of letters given to him by Colonel Robert Grogan of the Hibernian Bank deep into his black horsehide traveling bag. The addresses were of a most compromising character. They covered a half dozen of the very wildest leaders of the Irish party, both in Parliament and out.

"No one shall see these," smilingly vowed Wardlawe. "I do not fancy Newgate or Pentonville as an hotel."

On his person he now carried nothing but his regular letter of credit on the National Work's foreign bankers—the Rothschilds—and a sealed enclosure given to him by Everett Marsden.

"Help in time of trouble," the capitalist had quietly said. "This man is an alderman of London; he will be the next Lord Mayor, and so, is a Knight in expectancy. He controls one of the largest hotels in London. Go there; you will be safe at the Royal at Blackfriars. Polydor will take care of you!"

Mere curiosity caused Wardlawe to glance at the "carte blanche" letter to Wells, Fargo & Co.'s agency in London.

"Marsden is a game fellow!" gratefully concluded the Major.

And so, soughing winds and swirling seas bore them on to Liverpool at last, after an excitable landing at Queenstown.

Self-communing, Wardlawe was, however, amazed at the general ability, the profound culture of the unpretentious "Berry of the Artillery."

The "expert lying" had ceased; they "stood on their hands" as played at the first encounter on the boat, and a mere passing military good fellowship took the place of personal friendship.

And yet, Colonel Berry was a delightful reconteur, a thorough good fellow, with a blended dignity and bonhomie.

The dignity was uppermost at Queenstown, where Berry led Wardlawe down into his own cabin with a great sheaf of London and Dublin journals tucked under his arm.

"See here, my dear boy!" he said, closing the door, "there's the very devil to pay in London. Here we are at the 27th of January.

"On the 24th these dynamite fiends blew up the crypt at Westminster Hall, the Strangers' Gallery of the House of Commons and the second floor of the White Tower.

"Great damage and frantic panic! If the mad brutes had been experts they would have wrecked Westminster Hall and the House of Commons! It's bad enough as it is. Gladstone's seat was blown up. Now, be very wary! Watch over yourself!

"There is a crazy indignation over supposed American accomplices in this. If I can be of any use to you at Liverpool or London, let me know. Do not speak of this to a soul. Do not even discuss it in London! It may get you into trouble."

"I will get out of England at once!" wrathfully said Wardlawe. "I am not accustomed to be chased around as a malefactor."

"Sorry!" murmured the stolid Artillery officer. "Our people are in a blue funk about this. We despise all underhand work."

And so thanking Berry, Wardlawe betook himself to his deck-walking as the steamer ploughed her way up the Irish channel.

Penned up thirty hours later with a horde of Americans, on the sloppy docks of Liverpool, Walter Wardlawe grimly watched the grave-faced British customs inspectors sternly eying all the trans-Atlantic passengers. Before going down to the tug Colonel Berry, with a soldierly air of command, said: "Wardlawe, give me your revolver and cartridges! You could not explain their possession satisfactorily."

The American silently handed over his "six-shooter" and his box of cartridges, by some impulse hiding the Irish-American letters of introduction in a pocketbook in his black bag.

"Berry must be a man of mark," mused Wardlawe as the chief inspector chalked Wardlawe's handbag without opening it.

"The other travelers will be kept here for a day and all strictly examined," said Berry as the two favored men were ushered through the lines, where beauty in tears and stalwart men loudly cursing affected not the inspectors with their attendant squads of "bobbies."

"There's my trunk and the large portmanteau," suddenly said Wardlawe. "Give me your London address, sir," said the chief inspector. "I will send them on by the evening train. You can get the express by hurrying."

So Colonel Berry smiled softly as the address, "De Keyser's Royal Hotel, Blackfriars Bridge, London, E. C.," was labeled on the two pieces.

"Keys," said the American.

"Any friend of Colonel Berry's is 'persona grata,'" answered the chief with a wave of the hand.

In the four-wheeler, the Englishman was busy examining a mass of letters and telegrams handed to him at the dock.

"You see, I wired from Queenstown," he absently said, lighting a cheroot.

And before they reached York, the American had read all the penny dreadful accounts of the "terrific explosions."

"I shall not stay long in London," reflectively remarked Wardlawe. "Quite an upheaval in high society!"

"Just so!" assented Berry; "and worse than all, my boy, there's a great racket about the Pamir quadrilateral.

"If England and Russia fight, the world's wreckers will be kept busy for years cleaning up the battle fields! God help us! War is a fearful thing! We are all ordered to join!"

Tired and weary, the travelers stepped out on the great platform at Charing Cross station in London on a gray wet morning, when a view of the smudgy river and the tiled house tops was by no means inspiring.

The world's most fashionable "parting place" looked dreary enough.

They were running into the modern Babel, when Colonel Berry handed to Wardlawe his revolver and cartridges. "Keep them on your person till you reach the Royal Hotel," he gravely said. "I'm glad that you wired for rooms from Liverpool. The town is over full."

A half dozen officials and a group of men in plain clothes surrounded Berry of the Artillery, while Wardlawe hesitated in making his farewells.

Suddenly Berry strode up to Wardlawe, who was astonished to see such an official group. "I telegraphed from York; there is much to do at Woolwich. Dynamite has been found mixed with the factory coals! If that arsenal were exploded it would level half of Kent. I'm to be chief inspector for the present. See here, Major, I want to have your legs under our mahogany for once.

"Leave your sack here in the waiting room; they'll give you a brass check for it. Perfectly safe!

"Only nine miles; you can run over, take luncheon with me; we will dispatch your arrival to the hotel;

you will be back by sundown, and so you can take the midnight Folkestone and Boulogne train back if you care!"

Colonel Berry's erect and soldierly figure, the air of deference of the officials impressed Wardlawe. "A good man to know!" he mused. "I'll go!"

And so in ten minutes, they were gliding down the Thames, on the eastern bank, whose queer old Kentish inns gave a mediæval air to the gloomy river reaches.

"Singular!" mused Wardlawe, "none of the journals refer to the Russo-English war over the Pamirs! Only strange Americans with 'black bags,' who are going to blow up all London!"

There was a gleam of contentment in Berry's eyes as he gazed on the still romantic figure of the ex-soldier.

And at ease in his mind, Walter Wardlawe felt not the burden of his buckskin jerkin with the double packets of dangerous papers; for he was safe now under "official protection."

But they had left behind at Charing Cross a group of grave-faced men who whispered, "That's him, the head devil; sure enough!" as they read over Berry's telegram from York.

"I think he's good for a two to four weeks' delay," mused the Artillery officer. "It must be done! England forever! And I'll see that no harm comes to him! The Pamir cloud will soon blow over, and so, I'll foil Messrs. Gorlitz, Marsden and Mott, and a jolly good job!"

The new friends were soon deep in Berry's sketch of the great arsenal as the nine miles were quickly traversed.

Major Wardlawe threw up his hand mechanically as the stern sentinels came to a ringing present and the "guard turned out" for a field officer.

Two miles on the river—a half mile deep—the vast arsenal lay sullenly in the wet fog, with its hundreds of idle cannon, its roaring shops, its guarded storehouses.

A brief handshake with a grizzled officer, and they

were off to the brow of the hill, where the mess rooms and barracks were visible.

"Neither dockyard, naval works, shops nor arsenal is open to any one to-day," gloomily said Berry. "There is my ticket as Senior Field Officer Inspector. Without such a billet, not even ambassadors can enter! These are very grave times indeed!"

But they were at the splendid mess hall before Wardlawe could reply.

A crowd of officers in the reception room simply fell on Colonel Berry, while Wardlawe, with some pride, wrote his old designation—"Iron Brigade, Sixth Corps, Army of the Potomac."

"Now you've seen the outside of gun factories, carriage department, laboratories, Wardlawe," heartily said Berry, "and the Queen—God bless her!—trusts twenty-five millions of dollars here to us! Come into the guest room."

When the "sherry and bitters" were gravely discussed the Colonel led the American into a magnificent dining hall.

Twenty soldiers, in full dress, armed to the teeth, guarded the magnificent plate of the richest mess in the world.

The table was already set for two hundred. "His Royal Highness, the Duke of Cambridge, honors us to-night!" simply said Berry.

The bewildering splendor of the display astounded Wardlawe, accustomed only to the republican simplicity of those who "drank from the same canteen."

"There's a bit of plate here," fondly said Berry, "from every officer, alive or dead, who ever served in the Royal Artillery."

Leading his guest to the luncheon room, the American was soon surrounded by a score of men, not to be matched in the world for grit, bone and breeding.

A table for forty "seniors," round tables for sixty "subs," in groups of four, were "en évidence," while the bewildered Wardlawe, with a Marquis and a V.C. man on either side, gazed at the splendid mess dress of the celebrated corps.

Suddenly he saw Berry opposite, spring up as a tall

athletic man of twenty-seven, en civile, quietly made his way through the crowd.

"Here you are, Allan," the Colonel cheerfully said, and then, two heads went down in a whispered aside.

Over the table Wardlawe bowed to the "Honorable Allan Law," whose gray blue eyes were dancing with youth and manly vigor.

"Just the chap to lead a forlorn hope!" mused Wardlawe.

In the rattling fire of mess chat Wardlawe only gathered that "good fortune" had taken Lieutenant Law out of the corps some years before. "No end of a gold spoon fellow is Law!" whispered the V.C. man. "A great loss to us, but he hibernates here and roves the wide world in summer. "Once a captain, always a captain," you know! Strange compound of sybarite and shikaree, dandy and daring explorer. Tell him a fellow can't go to a place, then, Law is off by the next train! Nationality? Oh, North Country—I fancy, a bit of English, Danish, Scottish and Irish in this Hotspur! He has twenty good strains in him."

"He looks the thoroughbred every inch," mused the Major, gazing at Berry as an orderly came in with a sealed dispatch.

The Colonel's brow darkened as he broke the seal, and then, sending the order around, he watched the faces of the assembly as each man signed the envelope.

"Only you and I, Major, are out of this!" pleasantly said Law in a musical, well-toned voice.

"Jolly good job, too!" growled the Marquis as the slanting rain came down.

But a half hour later Major Wardlawe wondered, when one by one the officers stole away, each new comer signing the envelope and then disappearing until sixty signatures covered the long folds.

Cheroots and the genial "peg" had carried Law and Wardlawe into a friendly "modus vivendi" while Colonel Berry gravely conferred with a knot of captains gathered around him.

Insensibly drawn to the young civilian, Wardlawe laughed when Law gayly parried his linguistic

fencing. "You wouldn't fancy it!" he simply said. "But, I'm an English Russian!"

Suddenly a mounted orderly dashed up, and, after this messenger had reported, Berry of the Artillery frankly came forward.

"Wardlawe," he said, his voice sounding strangely muffled, "every officer of the Regiment is ordered at once on duty! Now, I've given you a flying glimpse of our Artillery mess; Law will see you safely back to London, as 'the pot boils' rather violently here just now!"

There was no mistaking the grave shadows on the Colonel's face.

"We can just catch the 3:30," sharply cried Law as the carriage drove up.

When the traveling companions parted it was with a soldierly hand grip.

"I know that we will meet again!"

Major Wardlawe was seated in the carriage before Law had finished a few words with the stern soldier who had donned his mess uniform and looked like a Red Prince as he waved his hand in adieu.

"I'll meet you again in the Bohemian Club some day, and you must dine with us when this scare is over—address me always here! I'll write or wire to the Royal."

The carriage was half-way to the station, when a mounted orderly overtook it. "By Jove! Niles! My old sergeant!" cried Law, flushing with delight.

"The Colonel's compliments, Sir! Telegram just come for you," said the soldier, proud of the stranger's greeting.

The whole parade was alive with movement as the carriage descended the hill.

"Pretty good shake-up, I fancy," mused Law; then, finding speech, "I may have to take the tidal train. Are you long for London?"

"I will only stay a day or so," absently said Wardlawe, still dazzled by a peep into England's cheeriest military mess.

Leaning back, enjoying the incomparable cheroots of the mess, Wardlawe curiously eyed Law. "A diplo-

mat, a lover, a poet, a traveler, a man of the world, a 'high life' specimen, hardly the type of a rough-working Artillery officer," he fancied.

And soon he fell under Law's winning charm and learned how the marriage of a relative with a great South Russian magnate had caused the visit of Law's mother when a girl wife to her patrician kinswoman.

"My father was on a long foreign tour in Her Majesty's service, and so, strangely enough, I was born in Kiev, Russia, and was three years old before my father saw me.

"Up to my tenth year, I studied at Kharkov and Kiev, visiting Odessa, where my august relative was Governor, and later, Constantinople, where he was Ambassador.

"And then I ran the gauntlet of Harrow, Woolwich, the service, and with a bit of the Foreign Office dawdling, have now relapsed into a citizen of the world, a 'man without country.'

"I have never found my niche as yet, the one which fits me exactly. I scorn harness and have looked over the world a bit, but so far I have missed my groove! I would have remained in the service if they would promise a fellow fighting, but the 'damnable iteration' of garrison routine would kill any man of spirit!"

When the train slid into Charing Cross Station, Law had remarked: "I can't understand your Yankee system! You keep a corporal's guard army. You raise vast forces, you develop mighty Field Marshals!

"When the wars are over, it's every man for himself; generals become once more editors and preachers. You, for instance, a veteran Senior Major, are"——

"An ironmonger, a jobbing engineer," modestly said Wardlawe as they edged their way to the window where the Major claimed his black bag.

"I will drive down to 'De Keyser's Royal' with you," pleasantly said Allan Law, "and see you rightly 'fixed,' as you Yankees say."

"And share an old soldier's dinner, I hope," heartily cried Major Wardlawe as a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder.

"I beg pardon, but, I must detain you," said a tall individual in plain clothes, while two robust policemen stepped up to Wardlawe's side.

"What the devil does this mean?" angrily cried the American.

"This is your bag?" gravely asked the delegate from Scotland Yard.

"Most assuredly!" said Wardlawe, wrenching himself loose as he seized his bag, only to lose it.

"There is some strange mistake here," quietly remarked Allan Law, putting up his glass and fumbling for a visiting card.

"None whatever!" firmly answered the Inspector of Police.

"Drive me to the American Minister's!" sternly said Wardlawe; "this is an outrage!"

But Allan Law had drawn the chief officer aside. The two returned together. "You claim to be socially accredited to the owner of the Royal?" said the officer, hesitating.

"I do!" roared Wardlawe in a rage.

"Then let's have no more row here, remarked Allen Law. "Let us all three drive down to the Royal! The officers can follow in a cab. If my friend (who is vouched for to me by one of Her Majesty's officers) cannot clear himself, then it's full time to take him into custody and to send for the officials of the American Legation."

"And you are not 'McNamara of Chicago?'" said a red-faced policeman, gazing earnestly at Wardlawe.

After a peal of laughter, the Major said to the astounded Allan Law: "I wish to God I happened to be that deadly individual! I would give the whole force here a good 'blowing up!' Come on!"

Shouldered through the gathering crowd, the party were soon whirling along the Thames Embankment.

"To be 'pulled' as a malefactor under the very sound of Bow Bells is laughable! I think I will leave this land at once!" said Wardlawe, turning to the young English-Russian.

"Say nothing!" remarked Allan Law when the Inspector grimly remarked: "I fancy you are in for

Pentonville, with ten or fifteen years across the water!"

There was an excited convocation in the courtyard of the circular front sweep of De Keyser's Hotel as the two carriages drove in.

A score of neat young Belgians hovered around the entrance, where a helmeted fireman and a silver-chained butler stood in state.

"They have telegraphed down!" whispered Law. "Keep cool! I will see you through!"

Ushered into the private office of the millionaire young alderman, the three men soon faced the courteous proprietor, who sat sternly mute, while the Inspector guarded the suspicious-looking bag.

The officer spoke plainly—"easy words to understand."

Allen Law, with a hand grasp of consolation, warmly interfered, and Major Walter Wardlawe sat motionless until the intellectual face of the Lord Mayor to be, was turned inquiringly to him.

Without a word, the American laid his keys before the proprietor and then handed him an open letter of credit. "There is my signature, Sir!" he said. "Here my passport! You can open this bag and examine its contents! You are a Magistrate, I believe. Please read this!"

Wardlawe had placed Everett Marsden's letter before the Belgian-born millionaire.

"Some mistake here, Inspector Addison," cheerfully cried the Alderman as he said to his cashier, speaking from the door: "Drive down to the Rothschilds and have their assistant manager return with you. It's only half past four! Tell him that it is a life and death matter!"

"In the meantime, gentlemen," he said, "let us adjourn to my private parlors. Send those men away!" calmly continued the magnate. "I will be responsible for Major Wardlawe, Mr. Addison!"

In a single file the party silently ascended the marble stairway, Addison clinging firmly to the bag.

"Is there any Paris train to-night?" haughtily demanded Wardlawe, when the Alderman asked him to

command him. "Yes, the midnight, by Folkestone and Boulogne!"

"I will take that," placidly said the American. "I would like my other luggage to be sent out of the country sealed! It was to be inspected here."

"I'll make the arrangements, Wardlawe, if you will honor me," politely said Allan Law. "I am going over to Poland to hunt bears with my foster brother, who recalls an old pledge.

"A few days makes no difference, and I'll take a run on to Berlin, at any rate. You go to Paris?"

Wardlawe bowed in silence, then said: "Please open the bag, Alderman! I waive all rights as long as you alone touch it. Show this gentleman everything in it."

"First, you must break bread in my house, Major," cried the millionaire, leading them to a sideboard where Law and Wardlawe accepted a glass of incomparable Hollands and an Imperial cigar.

Inspector Addison sat like the human statues of the Horse Guards, open-eyed and lost in silent wonder.

Five minutes later, Allan Law burst into a loud laugh as the Alderman, with alarm, showed him the superscriptions of Colonel Robert Grogan's letters.

"Read them!" defiantly cried Wardlawe. "There's something about his sister Frances. She did not materialize on the trip. Delayed, I presume!"

The American glumly watched the face of the Inspector as the Alderman read the rollicking introductions to the leaders of "Young Ireland."

There was an awkward pause when the examination was finished.

"My dear Baron," cried the millionaire, as a portly gentleman puffed into the door. "So kind of you!"

Five minutes later the sub-manager of Rothschilds said: "I will be this gentleman's recognizance up to a hundred thousand pounds! That is the exact sum of his letter of credit from the National Iron Works of San Francisco. This has been a brutal faux pas!"

"And here is a 'carte blanche' from Everett Marsden, the multi-millionaire steamship man of San Francisco," said the Alderman, "and also, a personal re-

quest that I make London comfortable for this gentleman."

"So you can, by getting me out of it," remarked the wrathful Wardlawe.

"If the gentleman would only answer a few questions," began the crestfallen Addison.

"Not one!" said Wardlawe with a rising dignity. "General Adam Badeau, our Consul-General, was my battlefield comrade. If I am detained, I shall beg him to help me to file a claim for the heaviest damages!"

Allan Law led the astounded Inspector aside.

When they returned the Scotland Yard official began an humble apology.

And then Wardlawe turned his back and resolutely said: "Go and hunt up McNamara of Chicago!"

Poor Addison, crept away, crestfallen and without a word.

It was the jolliest dinner imaginable, when Baron Sternberg, the Alderman and Allan Law had recounted to Major Wardlawe the recent blowing up of a railway room by a "ferocious American," who had left a black bag with peculiar locks on "temporary storage," a few days before.

"Everybody cannot be a thief, or a midnight assassin, or a deadly dynamiter," remarked Wardlawe. "Sorry not to fill the bill! This is my twentieth visit to London! Hereafter I will land at Cherbourg direct. I'll have that bag painted red in Paris and never set my foot on English soil again!"

"Nonsense!" cried Law as the Burgundy warmed their hearts.

"We will have you at 'a guest night dinner' yet, at the Royal Artillery Mess, and I propose to show you my old place in the North Country!"

"I shall claim you also," remarked the Alderman. "I will show you a bit of London; our sober commercial people have their 'off moments' when they 'sink' the shop!"

"And I will take you down to Sir Moses Montefiore's," genially remarked Baron Sternberg, "and try and surfeit you with good pictures—a home welcome—

and perhaps a drop of the Imperial Johannisberger! This whole thing has been a clumsy outrage!"

"Poor Berry!" laughed Allan Law as he rose to depart and make the traveling arrangements. "He will never forgive himself! But for leaving that unlucky bag to excite these numbsculls, you would have not been chased away in such a humor!."

"I think that I will leave my letters to the 'Irish Chiefs' safely sealed with you, Mr. Alderman," said the mollified Wardlawe, "for, I will not return till this Russian war cloud blows over."

"Do not jest upon that!" sadly said Baron Sternberg. "We men of money know that this flame of war, once fairly under way, may set Europe back five hundred years!

"Some day England and Russia will fight it out. God grant it not in our generation, not in fifty years! Delayed so long, it may be only a trade war. Now a rupture would drench all Europe with blood. For France and Germany would soon be dragged in!"

Four hours later the two strangely-made friends parted with the financier and the budding Lord-Mayor at the Blackfriars Station. "I have privately telegraphed to the Hotel Choiseul," said the Alderman. "Go there; use my name!" Wardlawe bowed his thanks. "You hold the only incriminating thing which I possess!" he said; "and I may come back, in happier days; but this time I shall return to America by Cherbourg!"

Baron Sternberg led Major Wardlawe aside. He whispered: "I did not mention before them the 'carte blanche' telegraphed to us by Everett Marsden. With your double letters on us you are safe everywhere on the continent.

"And if you go on to St. Petersburg," he whispered, "our local agent there will protect and advise you. He's a friend of Mott and Marsden and the 'Amoor Navigation Company.' Here is a letter written in Hebrew to him.

"No, do not start back! We are all partners in the Alaska Fur Company together and its Russian double. This war must not be! And the Rothschilds will not

permit it. But be silent, secret; guard yourself! Your very life is in danger if they find out about your documents!"

Stunned and silent, Major Wardlawe sank back in the train, having pocketed the letter and the Alderman's cigar case filled with the Imperiales.

"I am following a blind trail!" he murmured as he gazed at Allan Law's handsome head, with the silken blond mustache and the clustering side whiskers, "untouched by the barber's shear."

"It's a strange London experience; a bit of 'baccy and a nightcap' is a good counselor," remarked Law as he unfolded his rug.

Major Wardlawe was like a homeless wolf until the fiacre, next day, deposited him at that most quiet of resorts, the Hotel Choiseul, where a truly Parisian welcome awaited him, made doubly obsequious by the secret mandates of the great Alderman.

Allan Law had learned the gentle art of effacing himself.

"I will look in at our Embassy," he said, "and join you later at dinner. I've a stray cousin, a youngster, there on the staff."

Before sundown Wardlawe had secured his through ticket to St. Petersburg without leaving his room.

And two guarded cablegrams had flashed back his safety to America before he critically examined all his belongings. He had not forgotten the Parisian hats, the fur pelisse of Gallic elegance, a score of yellow literary masterpieces from Melchior de Vogüe down to Paul Bourget, and also neckcloths and waistcoats of Boulevardian magnificence.

"Henceforth I am a Frenchman!" he gayly vowed, when he dismissed the haberdashers—à bas les Anglais!"

But his face grew strangely stern as he rearranged his steamer luggage. Everything had been secretly ransacked in his trunk and large portmanteau, those pieces still sealed and "passed" by Allen Law's magic bonhomie at Boulogne.

Turning out his black bag, he found that the bottom

had been deftly taken off and carefully replaced. There was the fresh riveting and new stitching.

"So, so!" he growled, "attacked by one and doubly betrayed by others, could Berry have had any hand in this?"

He spurned the insulting thought when a telegram was handed him. It was dated at the Royal Hotel, Blackfriars, and signed by the bluff artillerist.

"Called to town to explain here officially as to your visit to Woolwich. Brutal outrage! Police stupidity! Will inform Allan Law when I see him. Set it all right in the clubs—and at the Mess! You must return here as my guest."

"This is all square," mused the American. "Colonel Berry does not even know that Allan Law has crossed the water with me."

"And, Law shows no desire to follow me up!"

It was clear that the police and customs had thoroughly ransacked all his luggage; this pressed upon Wardlawe's mind, but less than Baron Sternberg's reference to the elastic "Amoor Navigation Company."

"A shapeless mass, like Polonius' cloud!" mused the startled American.

"Now for the fox's skin to eke out the lion's hide!

"From Paris to St. Petersburg, with no break, and even Allan Law must not know!"

Alas! at that very moment the patrician ex-artillery subaltern was gently squeezing a hundred franc note into the hand of Madame Celeste Dacre, the strangely handsome wife of the head porter of the Choiseul.

"To Petersburg, direct, by Berlin and Eydtkuhnen! He goes—I saw the billets de voyage," murmured the blushing matron as Allan Law gazed into her dark velvety eyes.

"Taken, à haut prix, through a special messenger of l'Agence Cook. Ah! He spends money like a prince, this farouche American! He has bought like a Grand Duke—all day."

The exquisite little dinner was over at last, and at 9 o'clock, Allan Law took his leave. "Lascelles and

the other fellows have trapped me for the Embassy Ball, and so, here we part!"

"You go on to Berlin. Now this address, 'Hotel de l'Europe, Warsaw,' will reach me for a month, and Junior United Service Club, Charles street, London. Send a wire to each address of your movements. I will ask Berry to set you right in London when I see him!"

"See here, Law," said the Major, "I'll never forget the way that you stood by me over there beyond that tossing channel."

"Don't speak of it! There's no obligation!" answered the young Alcibiades. "I will yet show you what I can do for you—up in our own North country."

They parted at the gateway of the Choiseul, Wardlawe alleging his preparation for the midnight train. "I won't go to Dresden, Breslau and Varsovie for a week—perhaps not at all—if the situation gets ugly!" said Allan Law. "My passport is at our Embassy, and the Russians may not visa it for a week, if at all.

"Where will you be, at Berlin?"

"Kaiserhof!" sententiously said Wardlawe, and then the young Englishman drove away murmuring. "It's a shame to drag such a noble stag down! He is as free and open as the starry heavens!"

Tired and weary, Walter Wardlawe reached the Grand Central Bahnhof at Berlin thirty-six hours later, changing to his Petersburg train after eight hours' delay, while "Berry of the Artillery" read a closely written dispatch handed to him at Woolwich by a Queen's messenger, who had arrived from Paris.

"Thank Heavens! I have cut all the wires behind me!" mused Wardlawe. "Neither Berry nor Law can trace me!" He had not spoken to a chance voyager from Paris to Abricour, nor from Frankfort to Hanover. "Two days more and I can say, like Vich Alpine true, 'I have discharged my trust!'"

He smiled at the offensive sniffs of the German officials, returning his polished French with their guttural growls.

He gazed at a tall German doctor of philosophy, muffled to the neck, blue-goggled and with a hat of

antediluvian blocking, who fumbled an adieu at the door of the first class compartment in which Wardlawe sat alone. "Stupid this public affection—a bearded old Hirsutus Major slobbering over a departing brother."

"There is your man," whispered the disguised Allan Law to his attentive listener during these embraces. "The papers are in a jacket under his clothes. Remember, no blood, no bodily harm to him! Two thousand pounds for their contents!"

"Look out!" involuntarily called out Wardlawe as the train, starting, nearly overturned the begoggled Herr Professor.

"I'll be only six hours behind," mused Allan Law, "and this Queen's messenger passport is my best protection; but I will first give a dark brown to these golden locks of mine, and then I think the 'blue glass' goggles will carry the rest off! Only the Countess Dachkoff could recognize me in this guise! That fascinating Polonaise has a bone to pick with me! Now, if Jules Devroche has not forgotten his cunning as a 'rodeur,' the papers are mine! This elestic Company must be baffled till we get the torpedo destroyers and the three cruisers up from Valparaiso! After that, va banc! It's twenty miles against fifteen, as to the two fleets every time!"

While Wardlawe buried himself in a Revue des Deux Mondes, the stalwart young German stranger drew out a cap of the fighting "Franconia," lit a long betasseled pipe, and, producing a well thumbed copy of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason—in the language of Goethe and Schiller—began to secretly study his intended prey.

"Just how to do it," mused the disguised Devroche, "I can't see without strangling him and tossing the body out of the window. But there must be no violence! Ah, I must think! That money shall be mine!" Monsieur Devroche was the cleverest thug of all Paris.

Colonel Berry sighed as he laid down Allan Law's dispatch. It was ominous of a possible future.

"Our man has taken the alarm," wrote Berry's fellow conspirator. "His tremendous financial backing

made the whole accusation ridiculous. The Irish banker's letters of introduction were only provocative of 'poteen' and a 'night off!' And Sternberg and the great Alderman simply smashed the possibilities! Nothing in his luggage. The papers must be on his person. He has dined me and wined me—not himself! He is armed with a revolver and that damnable bowie knife, of whch you spoke. Sober and alert, he leaves apparently for Berlin. I have traced his tickets to St. Petersburg! Now the Ambassador, to whom I stole away, has given me Jules Devroche, an Alsatian 'rodeur,' equally French and German at will—a master of disguise, an athlete, once a champion wrestler, and, a master of every black art in the 'basse monde.'

"This man will haunt Wardlawe from Berlin to the Neva! If he can get in a compartment alone with him after passing Eydtkuhnen we will have those papers. Jules has orders not to harm a hair of his head, to use anything but violence. And he swears that he will win the fifty thousand francs. I follow on the next train as a 'dark-haired stranger,' hiding at the Embassy in Petersburg till I can approach Wardlawe. So, I'm there till we are ordered out! All's fair in love and war!"

"Is it?" gloomily mused Colonel Berry, burning the paper and rising to dismiss the jaded messenger.

"Only to save our commerce in the Pacific would I violate the laws of hospitality! Am I right? This gallant American is the innocent messenger of that unknown dragon 'The Amoor Navigation Company.'

"As their agent, I have every right to baffle him! Yes, for the Queen—to destroy the secret mandates of the plotters of the Czar! Oh! that Treaty of Paris! Fatal loophole! We sowed the teeth of Cadmus there!

"Yes, Allan Law is right—'all's fair in love and war!'"

Out on the lonely Amoor, long months later, Mr. Allan Law suddenly and irrevocably changed this lightly delivered opinion, then, gayly adhered to by one who ruled his very life, swaying the scepter of the empire of his being, in capricious white bejeweled

hands, in a practical application of his own chosen motto. And so, while Colonel Henry Seaforth Berry stuffed his pipe and took a moody 'peg,' the "schnell zug" dashed along eastward with Walter Wardlawe dreaming, under the keen eyes of the murderous Jules Devroche.

CHAPTER III.

"HE IS MY CHUM IN PARIS."

While Major Wardlawe, now on unfamiliar ground, keenly watched the face of every stranger as the Berlin train sped on toward dreary Konigsberg, he was doubly mindful of the seriousness of his trust. "One more long pull and I am safe!" he mused, thinking of Consul-General Gorlitz's secret preparations for his safety in Russia.

Two cipher cablegrams sent home had announced his safe passage through Berlin to the Iron King and the anxious Marsden.

A good German scholar, still, Wardlawe feared the lonely voyage to the Neva after passing Wirballen. "I fancy that the moujiks do not speak either French or German, and so I may have to resort to the 'sign language' of the plains."

He mused at ease over his possible trip to Saghalien, to lay out the great coal handling works at the bay of Dui.

"They can give me all the interpreters I need out there, with a convict colony of twenty thousand."

Assuring himself of the safety of his two sealed packets, his money hung around his neck, the Major eyed the little cross compartment with disgust. "I'm glad that I have my revolver and knife," he murmured. "It would be ugly enough to be locked in one of these man-traps with a malefactor!"

And yet he smiled in disdain as he gazed at the beaming face of the stocky German in the "Franconia" cap, poring industriously over his volume of

Kant. "He s a brave chap that!" mused Wardlawe. "Kant is 'sudden death' to the ordinary intellect." The Major had rebounded from a few pages of the "Critique Upon Pure Reason" once with a realizing sense of his own intellectual inferiority.

"Density, maximum!" he groaned.

And yet, as they neared the dreary Russian frontier, the two voyagers fell into an easy chat. "Herr Hugo Wandel" was on his way to join a great Russian noble at St. Petersburg as German tutor for three young princelings. "So it is, that I travel first class. I reflect my new master's glory. Hein!" contentedly cried Wandel, munching various sausage sandwiches with delight and imbibing floods of thin beer at all the stations.

"Simple good natured soul," mused the engineer when he had learned of Wandel's first visit to St. Petersburg as a translator in the German Embassy.

"I learned Russian from an old refugee noble who rented rooms from my mother in Dresden. And so I may be able to be of use to you when we change at the frontier into the great arks which they call railway cars."

Nature had gifted Jules Devroche with a true vagabond's artlessness, and his "expert lying" overmatched the cautious performances of Colonel Berry and Wardlawe.

The bitter blasts of an icy February whistled around the snow-mantled station at Eydtkuhnen, when Major Wardlawe, with a happy heart, seated himself in a compartment of the wide Russian railway car.

His mind was filled wth a pleasurable glow, for the doubled railway station common to Germany and Russia was thronged with servants speaking French, English and German with polyglot ease. The mere exhibition of his passport caused two colonels to approach him with a cordial politeness. "We have a private order from the Minister of the Interior to facilitate you!" said the senior, passing instantly all the Major's luggage unopened.

Here was a warm welcome to the icy land of England's bitterest foes!

And they had dinner, in the farther restaurant, where the pictures of the great Alexander III., stalwart son of Anak, and of the lovely Dagmar looked down majestically upon the four hundred famished voyagers.

With Wandel's Heidelberg stories, surrounded by pretty fur-toqued ladies, lively officers, quaint boyars and nondescript merchants, the Major sighed in a happy relief, "This is not so bad!"

And Fortune smiling, gave to the American the German tutor as a sole companion in the new car.

"'Second and third' are the grades usually patronized," simply said Wandel; "only our grandees, with the English and Americans, use the 'first.'"

Thoroughly Gallicized in his Parisian habiliments, Wardlawe, chatting easily in French, felt himself secure, and so he gave himself up to his French copy of Baedeker's Russie and to gazing out at the dreary frozen lakes, gloomy birch forests and log huts flying by them as the day faded.

"Supper, breakfast and dinner we get at stations of the first class," said the tutor, "all de rigueur," but coffee or tea, a toss of cognac, the man will bring us at any time. They are always on duty at each end of the car. Let me know if you wish anything."

Wardlawe was fain to trust himself to this simple-hearted German tutor, for with a sense of childish helplessness he found himself powerless in the hands of the guards, and even the red-shirted, high-booted moujik with the vacuous grin of the Russian peasant.

"There can be no danger here," he thankfully decided as he stuffed the unfortunate black bag under the low broad bed, which, with its opposite companion, were the only ones made ready in the cross compartment.

"A door, a good inside bolt, and the long covered aisle at one side of the car, with a guard at each end—verily, these Russians know how to travel, and there is an alarm gong in each compartment.

"A thousand new impressions flitted over his mind after the supper at Wilna, where mosque, synagogue, Catholic, Greek and Protestant churches attest the strange medley of the thirty-three nations of Russia.

"This is not so bad!" laughed Wardlawe, when Wandel announced breakfast at Pskov and a little dinner on the Neva. "I fancy that I will drive like the wind to Moika, twenty-one, get these papers out of my hands; after that, Paul Kurtz will be my shield and buckler. But I am all safe here!" he mused with a glance at the benevolent face of the German tutor lying with his coat off, musing on his Kant.

The rich half moonlight flooded the stateroom, and the murmur of humanity was easily audible through the thin partitions.

And the Russians, with a rank disregard of others, were carrying on all the scenes of la Comédie Humaine.

Though howling blasts swept by, the long car was viciously overheated and Wardlawe dazed off into uneasy dreams with his coat for a pillow and a rug thrown over him.

"A sorry spring season for England," he mused. "This London Bridge attempt adds to the horror of the other explosions! With the frightfully devastating storms, the impending Gordon horror, the mutinous Irish, the rampant Dervishes, the Gladstone Ministry is tottering to its fall!

"And now, the Russian war cloud follows the Spanish earthquakes!

"Tiber inundations and ghastly hurricanes have crippled trade, with other horrors still in the womb of Time!

"Is England drifting toward catastrophes, with neither a Nelson nor a Wellington?"

And then his mind drifted away to the grim storm-lashed Saghalien, the mystic valley of the silent Amoor, mighty flood haunted by the memories of Genghis Khan, the cradle of the Tartar world conquerors!

He roused himself with a start as Hugo Wandel touched his arm. "A cup of the incomparable Russian tea, and then, sleep, my friend! You are weary!"

Raising on his elbow, Wardlawe watched Wandel give the order to the obedient moujik. The car was quieted down now. Both care and flirtation had

sought their pillows! The rattle of gold and cries of merry gamesters had subsided; only the monotonous click of the wheels punctuated the night as the train sped over the low lands.

The windows were all thick with frost rime in exquisite tracery, and the warmth of the long car was stifling!

When Wandel brought the tea in himself, Wardlawe gazed in wonder. "Every good Russian travels with his own tea!" the tutor smiled. "I have some of Count Nadaroff's very best! The house only furnishes you the hissing boiling water.

Seated opposite each other, the two men chatted while they slowly sipped the fragrant restorative.

"A sort of a Zinzendorf, an ideal moral reformer," mused Wardlawe as he listened to Wandel's simple fortunes.

And yet, there was a pretty blue-eyed Bertha down in Wurtemberg, who was yet to share the tutor's prosperity on the great estate of Ilianka.

Teacup in hand, the German babbled on with a serene smile on his face.

And yet that same infantile bonhomie had often aided Jules Devroche, renegade collegian, driven out for theft, seducer, valet de place, communist, murderer of an aged master, robber, ex-mouchard, and now secret service spy at Paris, drifting for safety into the hands of a reckless young English attaché, desirous of seeing the "inner life" of Paris.

"Rodeur"—yes, a deadly one—and withal a man of the smoothest aspects!

"We stop for wood and water twenty miles from here," murmured Wandel. "The other train passes! It's a good place to catch your beauty sleep while we are halted for a half an hour; there is no hurry here! Ah!"

The agile scoundrel leaned forward and caught Wardlawe's falling cup and saucer.

"So soon!" he whispered, as he glided out with the teacup, and then returned, softly closing the door and yet fearing to slip the bolt.

For there, before him, lay Major Wardlawe gasping

gesticulating and yet, struggling with an appealing glance in his eyes!

"My poor friend!" murmured Jules Devroche, firmly bearing the American's shoulders back to the rude pillow.

The wheels were already stopping as, with a self-satisfied grin, the midnight thief saw Wardlawe exhausting himself with trying to rise.

"Only twenty minutes here! I must hasten!" muttered Devroche in his natal French, as the train ran past straggling lines of squared log-houses, with a few lights feebly blinking in the storm.

"Dünaberg!" whispered the thug. "My Jew friends will hide me here in the bazaar. And from Riga to Memel is only a few hours! Allons! That fifty thousand francs must be mine!"

Then bounding like a tiger on the drugged victim, Devroche muffled the American's head in the rug.

Holding his faintly struggling victim down, he quickly explored the bosom of the prostrate man with the skill of a professional thief.

A knife flashed out as the French miscreant ripped the lightly belted buckskin jacket. "Inside! Ah! inside!" he murmured.

There was a heavy jar as the train ran on into the "bumpers," and the knife, turning on the leather bands, deeply scored Wardlawe's bosom.

The crash had thrown the two men from the couch, and the pain of the deep rasping flesh wound instantly brought back Wardlawe's consciousness as Devroche tugged at the flaps of the inside pockets.

A dozen passengers had sprung into the side aisle in a wild alarm as Wardlawe's last frantic cry, "Help! Murder!" rang out in a desperate agony;

A gust of icy air blew through the aisle as a door was torn open, and then a stalwart young American leaped into the deserted compartment.

"Let that American alone!" resolutely cried the stranger, as he dragged the frightened moujik away. The car porter's hands were covered with blood as a tall man in a flowered silk nightgown, with a pince-

nez on his nose, said calmly in English: "What's this trouble?"

"They have murdered this man, among them! Can't you see?" wrathfully replied the intruder.

And then, Dr. Alexis Pauloff, shaking up the trembling moujik, gave rapid directions in Russian.

"Clear out all!" testly exclaimed Pauloff, as he leaned over the sufferer.

"I am an American, and I'll not leave this man! Here is foul play!" said Robert Standiford, resolutely holding the door. But, Pauloff was already busied with the bleeding victim.

"Attempt at robbery!" he murmured; "a painful flesh wound," and then his face grew grave as he watched Wardlawe's cataleptic eyes. "There's worse! Poison—some narcotic poison!" he shouted as the squad of police, gray-coated, turbaned, with diagonally slung swords, crowded to the door. "Take away this fool! Get the man who ran out of here! Quick! This is a terrible crime!"

With a few stern words, Pauloff hastened away. Running back with a cup of mixed mustard and hot water, he forced it into the helpless man's mouth.

"The wound is nothing; here, the towels!" and he swathed the sufferer's lacerated chest.

"Can we remove him?" anxiously said the American.

"I am Robert Standiford, foreign agent of the Hotchkiss Company of Paris."

"I, Alexis Pauloff, private physician to the Grand Duke Michael!"

"No! Strong coffee and a good beating will counteract the narcotic! It was clumsy to give it in tea! And only a half dose, too, for the assassin was quietly finishing his work with the knife."

In all the clamor, the old army surgeon alone kept his head.

"Let us secure the valuables of which the thug would have robbed him!"

It was the work of a moment to strip the blood-stained chamois jacket and then cut away the note-bag.

"Papers! A serious crime!" growled the Surgeon. "Now, to our work!"

In half an hour, the train proceeded upon its way with the old Russian doctor, the strange American and a captain of police watching the exhausted Wardlawe.

"Tell me, do you know him?" said Pauloff. "He will live! It was a close call! The knife wound and the jarring with the heat sickened him! Nature had our work already half done for us!"

"Here is his passport!" said Standiford. "Walter Wardlawe!" And these sealed papers are all addressed to the First Secretary of the American Legation."

While the Surgeon and Standiford conversed in low tones, the Police Captain handed Dr. Pauloff a slip of paper pinned to the parchment.

"What is it?" eagerly cried the young American.

"He is a person under the especial protection of our government," gravely said Pauloff. "I will telegraph from Resbitza to the Minister of the Interior and also to my friend, the American First Secretary. Let us make a list of all his articles and place all these things in our joint custody with Captain Scheremetieff as the custodian."

Wardlawe's faint groans punctuated the long examination of the frightened moujik who served that end of the car.

The alarmed voyagers had all been driven into their cells, and two soldiers sat, with their muskets ready, on stools in the side aisle.

"The other, the other did it!" wailed Ivan Ivanovitch, fearful of a six months within the "Polygon."

"The German man with blue eyes and golden beard—there is his book lying, his hat and coat! That is his own bundle and bag! He fled away with this poor Barin's new fur pelisse and soft hat! He nearly overturned me at the door, and I ran in, hearing the yell, and so my hands were covered with blood!"

"Stupid! You are, of course, innocent!" cried Pauloff. "Did you find no traces?"

"There are acres of wood piles, Barin," said Ivan.

"Our soldiers are so slow! The snow is very deep, and blinding as it falls! He got away for a time!"

It was indeed so. The flakes were whirling down without as the train ran on with muffled wheels.

"The whole force at Dünaberg is on the alert!" ventured the Captain.

Pauloff's fine sneer was not lost on Standiford, as the old man snorted: "Imbeciles! Tchinoviks! Fools! Then, he is safe!"

And the Grand Duke's physician was right!

Before they reached the telegraph station to warn the police at Pskov of the crime, a man clad in a Jewish gaberdine sneaked out of a low Polish-drinking booth and boarded the midnight train for Riga at Dünaberg.

Jules Devroche regretted the splendid new fur-lined pelisse and Parisian hat exchanged for the greasy foxskin cloak and vile rags. But he had seen his passport as Hugo Wandel crackle in the flame, and "Isidor Hertz, cook," was possessed of a passport duly visad to leave Russia by Riga and Memel. With the blond wig and beard stripped off, Jules Devroche looked the vaurien cook to his grime-stained hands. He never regretted the golden Imperial coin tossed to Rebecca Einstein as he grasped her last bottle of vodki.

"I can telegraph from Memel to this English milord!" snarled Devroche. "Curse him! He must put up a few thousand francs or I'll sell this story to the Russian Ambassador! Lascelles will pay me later at Paris but I'll frighten a few thousand out of this young fool! Damn that collision with the bumpers! He waked up like a 'stuck hog' when the knife slipped. What a yell!"

When the train slowly ran into the great Petersburg station, Walter Wardlawe was gazing wearily in the face of the good-humored Robert Standiford.

His groan of pain, when he displaced the swathing bandages, his aching head, his sickening qualms left him as helpless as a child. "Be calm, my dear Sir! You are among friends! You have been a little ill! All is safe!" soothingly said Dr. Pauloff, at whom Wardlawe gazed in a blank wonder. "We will cut

the car off and side-track it when the people all go away," cheerily said Standiford, "and your friend Paul Kurtz of the American Legation will be here to meet you."

"Who hurt me? What is the matter?" feebly said Wardlawe, gazing at Robert Standiford's cheery face, with the dark eyes, the Vandyke beard and "a Yankee cut of the jib" all around. "I am Robert Standiford of Bridgeport, Connecticut," slowly said the young arms dealer. "I travel for Hotchkiss! I found you ill! Just be quiet! Your stuff is all right! Fifteen hundred pounds—your loose money—your letter of credit and passport, your sealed papers (the dispatches)," he whispered. "You are Walter Wardlawe?"

"Yes!" gasped the wounded man. "San Francisco! Find Paul Kurtz quick!" and then, he sank back exhausted.

Half an hour later Paul Kurtz bent over Wardlawe, when the sufferer opened his eyes under the stimulus of a draught of brandy. "All right, Major! It's Kurtz! Just keep up a little!"

"Where will you take him?" asked Standiford.

"To my house," cheerily said Dr. Pauloff. "I'll have him on his feet in a week, better than ever!

"And my own valet shall watch with you," said Kurtz, whispering a few words in Wardlawe's ear.

"That's right, that's right; bring him!" gasped Wardlawe.

In five minutes, a stern man of sixty-five, with piercing black eyes and a Tartar mustache, leaned over Wardlawe.

On the shoulders of the General's coat were the glittering straps of an Imperial aide-de-camp.

The collar and cuffs of the gray surtout were a colonel's ransom, and a matchless blue diamond glittered on the ex-Dictator's finger.

"It is the Count Nicholas Ignatieff!" solemnly said the Captain of Police. "Give us the bundle!" cried Robert Standiford. "He wants the papers!"

With wolfish eyes, Wardlawe gazed on Paul Kurtz,

examining the intact seals of the blood-stained packages.

Then, after a whispered colloquy with Ignatieff, Wardlawe said: "Give the two envelopes to His Excellency! Bear witness that I have kept my faith!"

"Major!" said the great Ambassador, "if you were a Russian you would be made a hereditary Count for this! I myself will take you later to Admiral Chestakoff! Now, Pauloff will guard you! When he gives you over as well, you belong to me! Your fortune is made! I will call on you every day!"

Turning with gravity, General Count Ignatieff said: "As gentlemen, I now request an absolute secrecy from all! Not a word of this, or the babbler will leave Russia forever! I will take Captain Scheremetieff away with me! I go direct to the Minister!"

"See here, Major," gaily said Kurtz, "the Russian ladies will soon cure your wounds, and then, you'll forget the railway accident, you know! I'll take all your valuable funds and everything loose. Your luggage and other things, Dr. Pauloff takes with you!"

"The poor Professor, my companion, 'Hugo Wandel' of Heidelberg, the man who was with me!"

"I fear that he was killed in the collision! The floor was bloody! We did not find his body!" said Paul Kurtz, with a sly wink at the genial Robert Standiford.

"Ah! He was coming as tutor to Count Nadaroff, at Ilianka Chateau, at Rovno!" mourned Wardlawe, covering his face with his hands.

"It was dreadful, that sickening crash!"

Dr. Pauloff drew the two gentlemen away.

"You see, I was right! He was followed for murder and robbery! There is no Count Nadaroff, no Ilianka Chateau. I am from Rovno! The Lubomirskis are the only nobles there; they own the whole town! I was born there. They are my own cousins!"

"Let him come slowly out! Better so! And General Count Ignatieff demands our silence! Let him tell Wardlawe all later!"

"Very good," gayly cried Paul Kurtz. "Doctor, we leave your patient with you! As for you, Standi-

ford, I've had telegrams and mail for you, for a week! Your firm has wired me to take charge of you! Mr. Jewell wants to see you at once! But to-night you dine with me and, Mademoiselle Petitpas of the Opera, that angel of prima ballerinas, will teach you Russian!"

After a few words to Wardlawe, the rich young American exile—a diplomat by mere choice—dragged away the man from Bridgeport.

"See Chestakoff at once!" whispered Wardlawe to the Secretary of the Legation.

"When he acknowledges the papers, just telegraph to Everett Marsden: 'Papers safely delivered' and 'Safe arrival' to Sterling Mott.

"Wardlawe," whispered Kurtz, "Your Amoor Navigation Company may change the world's history! War will be declared in a month! The English Embassy is even now packing up! The Czar has sent eighty thousand men to Astrakan to reinforce Komaroff! You have barely escaped the chase of the tireless wolves! You will go to the Grand Duke Michael's palace and you have earned a whole nation's gratitude! Your star is in its zenith! Your fortune is made! Russia never forgets! I will come every day! Leave all to me! Then, when well, you come to my bachelor home on the Nadenjskaya. Pauloff is an old angel in gray, a jewel! Trust him! He has handled the Czar's life, and that alone!"

"See here, Standiford!" faintly babbled the Major, "I know that I would have died in that horrible wreck but for you! You saved my life! I'll get even with you!"

"Paid in advance!" said the man from Bridgeport. "Only get well and help me stand off the Russian ladies! I am told that they give no quarter!" And here Pauloff interrupted with a glass of champagne—the great cure all!

Carefully wrapped in furs, lifted tenderly into a great sleigh, Wardlawe wondered at the magnificent station, the splendors of the Nevsky, the broad street where an army could march in divisions, and the jingling troika bells lulled him to a gentle sleep.

When he awoke again, Wardlawe gazed in wonder at the magnificence of the bed chamber in the state wing of the Grand Duke Michael's palace.

The stars were shining in at the doubled windows, while by a feeble taper a beautiful young nun was telling her beads.

"Do they have angels as nurses here?" mused Wardlawe when the silent sister arose and, gliding to his side, asked in musical French for his wishes. Sister Agatha was only an embodied angel!

Walter Wardlawe never knew of the sorrow of a lover lost at the Grivitza Redoubt, which sent the rosebud beauty of the Catherine Institute into the dark-robed ranks of the Sisters of Mercy.

But he did know that "angels came and ministered unto him."

While he vainly tried to unravel the mystery of his voyage from Berlin, a secret fear of disaster weighing on him, the Honorable Allen Law was lounging before the great Russian stove in the magnificent drawing room of the English Country Club at Tosna.

Only thirty miles from the capital on the Neva, the haughty Britons of the Embassy had a little "pied-à-terre" of their own, free from the daily visitations of the Third Section.

The cheroot fell from Allan Law's handsome lips as he read the long telegram slip handed him by a sturdy English servant.

"The damned clumsy fool!" he shouted. "My life may pay for this!" He feared nothing personally as yet, for he was on English ground, as the "Country Club" was flying the flag of the Embassy.

In a stupor he read: "Business a total failure; nothing done. I go to Paris. Letters through friend. Send money. Have suffered much."

There was the signature "G. Caisson," as agreed. "I wish I had him on a gun caisson. I would run him over a precipice!" growled Law. "And so, I have failed to outwit Wardlawe! He has had a whole day in St. Petersburg! Enough time to dig my grave and to bury me! I must lie perdu here!

"And yet, I must warn our Ambassador! My discovery as an agent in this would mean my death!

"And so to conceal my F. O. character, I must stand out of the war and all the fighting! I will wait for a few days and then, meet Wardlawe 'on the friendly basis.'

"Only by deceiving him and lulling him can we gain time to get the two Chilean twenty-knot cruisers and the three torpedo destroyers safely up to Esquimalt from Valparaiso.

"Yes, our navy must have that fleet, at any price!

"And the telegrams must go off at once! I'll call Rutledge, and the Chief must use his cipher direct to Downing Street!

"So this renegade brute got away to Memel; he must have failed at Dünaberg, and it will be four to six days before I can get his letters from Paris. This frank American was born under a lucky star!"

Standiford and Paul Kurtz, Dr. Pauloff and General Ignatieff had all ocularly verified Major Wardlawe's rapid recovery before Allan Law learned the reasons of the total failure of Jules Devroche.

The Major was triumphant in the awarding of the great Dui coal mine constructions, and had even been honored with Admiral Chestakoff's call of half an hour, his cablegrams to San Francisco all duly verified, when General Ignatieff said: "We will now place you at Paul Kurtz's as his personal guest, to allay any suspicions in society! Your own entrée will be at a splendid dinner given by General Michael Annenkoff, where you can meet all our secret friends! This will explain your presence thereafter anywheres.

"My own home on the Moika is open to you, but you must give all your mornings to the 'Amoor Navigation Company.'

"The war is imminent! Two weeks will decide! The campaign will open in eight weeks in its full rage, unless England withdraws her bold ultimatum!

"Before a week, Chestakoff must know every detail of each one of the thirty-seven steamers of the 'Amoor Navigation Company' now at San Francisco."

"I did not know that they had even one, Your Excellency," faltered Wardlawe.

General Ignatieff handed Wardlawe a cigar from a gold case with a diamond coronet emblazoned therein, the gift of a grateful Emperor.

"By transferring five millions of dollars in gold through Consul-General Gorlitz to your friend Everett Marsden, we can become the owners of every seaworthy steamer now available on the Pacific coast!" calmly said Ignatieff. "We have just paid him one million dollars for an option on these boats for one year. One cablegram closes the purchase when the English Ambassador asks for his passports!

"And so, thirty-seven privateers will be loosened at once on the British commerce of the Pacific!"

"Ah! the Treaty of Paris!" cried Wardlawe, in a fever of excitement.

"Yes, the one invincible arm which Russia will use to cripple England to its financial ruin. Russian 'Alabamas!'" sneered the great ex-Dictator.

"The papers?" cried the Major.

"Dimitri Gorlitz has fifty sealed letters of marque in blank in his bank vaults at San Francisco, and he only waits to insert the chosen names! You will later take the original warrants over to him!"

"I fancy that I have been an innocent dispatch bearer for the last time! The wolves were on my track more than once!" said Wardlawe.

"Your reward waits for you! I will tell you all later. You have foiled the whole English Secret Service since you landed at Boulogne!"

"But, you have no crews, guns and arms!" persisted Wardlawe.

"Our whole Siberian and Asian fleet sets sail at once on our telegraphed order to Vladivostock, and, with crews, supplies and arms, will meet the Amoor Navigation Company's fleet at the islands off Sitka! The steamers will be armed there and begin their work! We have effectually closed by mines Vladivostock, Emperor's Bay and Nicolaievsk. An English fleet attacking would be blown to atoms.

"And our own heavy fleet will assail Esquimalt

and capture the unprepared cruisers and boats which the English have secured at Valparaiso! Our best Secret Service men are now watching them! This is all Dimitri Gorlitz's work, and it makes him a Foreign Minister! He has just captured a lovely American wife. I had the cablegram yesterday."

"And, the Amoor Navigation Company?" said the American.

"Is the Czar, is Russia, is anything we choose to call it!" proudly cried Ignatieff. "Your future works for Sterling Mott, several other vast projects and much of our final advance on China, Corea, Manchuria and the Yellow Sea are veiled under the name of this nominal corporation, which has only a half dozen little trading steamboats on the mighty Amoor!

"We can do anything that we choose under that cabalistic name! It has given Marsden an easy million! It will give the National Works several, yet!

"Mines, towns, bridges, railways, barges, steamers, warships, trading stations—all these are merely synonyms in this name, for the Czar, which is, all the Russias—a united hundred millions of loyal people.

"It is under that ægis that you will go back to Saghalien as in sole charge of the great Dui works, destined to coal our whole war and trading fleet with our privateers of the future! Now, not another word till you are a guest under the American flag, with Paul Kurtz.

"Then you belong to Chestakoff and myself! I am 'on extraordinary foreign duty,' though without portfolio, until we have backed up Komaroff or have been beaten! Let me tell you the hero already has disputed the valleys! He has cut the Afghans all to pieces!

"England now knows it! And so, we are to-day preparing lists of every Englishman in Russia, with orders to them to leave in twenty-four hours!

"Come to me; let me present you to Madame Ignatieff, and she shall tell you all the strange story of your peculiar accident!

"But never mention the name of the 'Amoor Navigation Company!' If you do it means disgrace, expulsion, the betrayal of your friends! Only Chesta-

koff and I are permitted to name it! My home is open to you! I will give you my own library for your private work. The Countess will show you the flower of our land—the ladies! And as to this, beware! For they are irresistible! At least I found them so in my youth!" cried the conqueror of Schamyl with a sigh as he departed.

"A land of witchery, of fascination, of barbaric splendors! I have been here a week, and save a Grand Ducal bedroom and an angelic nurse, I am without a glimpse of the glories of the Neva!

"A land wherein to guard both head and heart, it seems! I wonder if Law is hunting his bears! Gallant fellow!" mused the too trustful American.

When Dr. Pauloff bundled Major Wardlawe into the sleigh, which was at last to take him away to Paul Kurtz's bachelor home, the American's eyes were filled with a grateful mist.

"You owe me nothing, my dear boy," said the old Surgeon. "It is only to save you from perhaps future troubles that the Grand Duke sends you to Kurtz! You are one of us! And you shall have palace lodgings for your life if you ever need them!

"Later you can send me some of the incomparable books on the new American surgery; I have a 'censor's permit' from the Grand Duke.

"And I shall see you three times a week! You nearly lost your life for our cause!

"In days of trouble, Russia is but one united family! Nihilism! Bah! In forty years we have murdered one Czar; you, two Presidents! Is it an English poet who says, 'We always kill the thing we love!' Three days from now, I'll show you a sample of Russian disaffection."

Sister Agatha had departed, wearing a ring which had been worn by the Major's gentle mother.

"Far above rubies, I will prize it!" she whispered. "You risked your life for Holy Russia!"

And now, strange lurking suspicions followed Wardlawe in his musings as he was driven to the superb apartment of the rich bachelor First Secretary.

That his roughly incised wound was caused by a

piece of loosened steel in the wrcek of the railway car, seemed all natural enough, and the torn and blood-stained buckskin vest had been promptly burned by the Doctor, on General Ignatieff's suggestion.

And thus, Wardlawe never saw the clean knife cuts of the desperate Devroche!

Unable to read the Russian journals, he, of course, had seen no details of the wreck of the train at Dünaberg. "Poor Wandel!" he sighed, his 'maid Ultruda' will wait long for him in vain!"

For Surgeon Pauloff had only dryly remarked, "The German's body was not found! His fate is unknown!"

It was a bewildering ride to Paul Kurtz's home, where Standiford and the host now awaited their convalescent visitor.

Glimpses of a great courtyard, with straw-swathed trees, statues, winter wrapped, in strange cerements, half frozen sentries, dashing sleighs and great granite walls, the sounds of clanging bells, and the evening gun from the "Polygon" were all Wardlawe's memories as the great magnificence of the Winter Palace and Hermitage, the Champ de Mars and the noble river burst upon him.

Apple green sky, towering spires, vast façades, copper green cupolas, great temples, huge columns—all these stunned him.

"These vast granite squares seem builded by giants for a Titanic Court! Here is indeed the frozen lair of the Ice King!"

But, bewitching faces peeped out from their fleecy wraps, and a wild romance clung to every corner with the four silent Cossacks mounted on shaggy ponies and holding their cruel lances in a deadly menace.

Major Wardlawe was now able to hobble around Paul Kurtz's splendid rooms without difficulty, his only suffering being the straining of the tender wounds of his breast.

"Your good stout ribs saved your life!" gaily cried the Secretary as over a real open wood fire, Kurtz and Standiford proceeded to "swap" their memories of Cambridge and Yale with their Princeton visitor.

"Here you are in America!" gayly cried Kurtz. "I've been an exile, a diplomatic slave, for seventeen long years! Rome, Vienna, Paris, and Lisbon have not denationalized me! Rove at will over my possessions!"

And a jolly supper it was when Wardlawe found that Standiford was about selling sixty full field batteries of Hotchkiss cannon to the Czar. "It's an ill wind which blows nobody good!" winked the man from Providence.

"War or no war, if I make my sale, Ethel Raynor signs herself Ethel Standiford in three months, for I will be made for life. There are five hundred tons of fixed ammunition included with my offer.

Cautious, cool and sly, Paul Kurtz coached the Major when Robert Standiford had departed. "I've duly inscribed you! Registered your passport! Left your cards for His Excellency, our Minister, Marshall Jewell. Next week he will dine you 'in a group.' Keep away from him! Plunge into all purely Russian society! And so you will escape notice!

"You will have my carriage and man to take you daily to Count Ignatieff's. He will send you to Chestakoff's private bureau.

"And you and I will talk our business over daily before you leave! All your papers will be locked in my private safe! Now, one word of advice! Never mention England or Russia! Speak of business to no one but the three I name. Baron Knorp has been sent away to Saghalien and the Amoor to conduct the defence there! Prince Wittgenstein will lead the troops defending Vladivostock, Possiette and Emperor's Bay.

"General Michael Annenkoff will be your social sponsor, and, for eight weeks, all you have to do is to wait, watch; be prudent, and enjoy yourself! All your mail comes in my sealed Legation bags."

"But can I not go out alone?" demanded Wardlawe; "that is, when I get a new fur-lined pelisse! It appears that mine was cast away in the railroad wreck!"

"Yes!" said Kurtz, "I will give you a Russian

'special permis de séjour en ville,' obtained through Ignatieff, a paper which will make you the king of the town! Simply exhibit it! You will we absolutely invincible everywhere, just as long as you guard your tongue! Say but three things:

"'Russia, the finest land on earth! Petersburg, the handsomest city! The Russians, the heartiest race on the globe!'"

"And—the ladies?" mischievously cried the Major.

"You'll carry many a heartache away from here!" solemnly said Kurtz. "Never jest about the Russian women! They will interject either a paradise or a tragedy into your life, unless you lock your heart's door!

"And now as to General Ignatieff and Chestakoff!" anxiously said Kurtz.

"Every day at ten you will go to the great ex-Dictator and he will 'pull the wires!' Beginning tomorrow I will provide you pelisses, fur turbans and every local need! I am showered with gifts of these!

Late they talked over the glowing embers with old-fashioned "hot Scotch" grog to break the ice.

Dilettante, poet, student, antiquary, author, sportsman and man of the world, Paul Kurtz was a favored child of fortune! His superb library, pictures, bronzes and trophies, his art and travel collections were all of wondrous beauty.

The confidant of a dozen reigning beauties, it was only months later that Wardlawe learned of Kurtz's singular celibacy, his bride-to-be having been burned, years before, in a girlish trial of her wedding robes.

And so, serene and lonely, the cultured diplomat had reached forty, with no forgetfulness of a sundered tie, grown doubly dear by watchful memory.

Suave, distinguished, a Spanish cavalier in his gravity, a dark knight of courteous mien, Kurtz was as cosmopolitan a man as America ever sent out to wander under its diplomatic ægis.

"Now you are duly warned!" said the host. "This house is yours! You will be kept there at least three months! Make all the love you want! Make no new

business friends! I will 'post you' on every one! Distrust all roving Americans! Tell Standiford none of your affairs! He is a very fox of the foxes! And his fortune is made! He is Hotchkiss' right hand man! Your personal writing room will be here, behind your bedroom, and each morning all goes into my safe.

"So your secrets are well guarded! I know my own rooms are searched by servant spies every day, and I calmly prepare for it! I have learned to dissimulate here! All of Russian social life is only easy dissimulation! Enjoy the passing moment and waste no words on any one! Tell me nothing of your affairs! Mott and Marsden have bade me serve them through you! Our government must know nothing of these vast enterprises of your duplex chiefs!" Wardlawe bowed. "You are their guest here really, not mine! For they back me with all I need—the influence of power and capital at Washington, to keep me in, and to change me around till I reach the 'falling out' halting place!"

"As to the English," anxiously said the Major, "God help the two great countries, allied in marriage, foes by policy, destiny and every warring interest! There will be a terrible clash some day. Each land is kept ready for a bloody war!

"And I hope it will yet be averted! Yet they say the Rothschilds support the Czar secretly, and other money kings! It is sad! England bungles all under Gladstone! Look at the Gordon butchery! And after all our high life here is modeled entirely on the English idea! So many friendships to break, so much rending of kindly ties! We are doubly courteous to the English Embassy, which is really packing!

"Now, your keynote is a cordial friendship to all. Never mention this war cloud! Their staff here are delightful fellows, beloved and esteemed! You are supposed to be a mere looker-on in Vienna! So you may disguise your real status here! I have had a Russian hoodwink me for ten long years! Just give yourself out as an American traveling for mere pleasure. And be especially friendly unto the English attachés. You'll meet them all at Annenkoff's dinner.

"At the Yacht Club, the Two Bears' Restaurant, the Guard's messes, the Country Club, the Island—you'll soon see them all! For you'll be kept here till the end of May surely! For the works at Dui will not be built till the fortifications are done! There are twenty thousand men making the three ports impregnable to-day to any naval attack!"

While they spoke, Allan Law was busy glowering over the letter of Jules Devroche at Tosna. The baffled Secret Service volunteer had received a reproof from "Berry of the Artillery," which told him that his functions "had been indefinitely suspended!"

"Our ultimatum is being prepared! You could have stopped off Wardlawe's communications by prompt action! The past never returns with its one golden opportunity! I am sorry, but your official career is at an end! No resignation is necessary, as Sir James Clarke told me that you had been dropped—that's all!"

"All's fair in love and war!" sadly repeated Allan Law, pacing up and down before his crackling fire.

"Here is this clumsy Devroche with his explanation. For the last time he read the spy's long letter: "I had him for hours at my mercy! I knew where the papers were! I could have quietly knifed him, dropped off the train then with the papers, and so made your future and my fortune. You would have no violence! There you are—a fool's scruple! Now, with feet crippled by freezing, broken and penniless, you and Lascelles must keep me! But for the drunken engineer running into those 'bumpers' with a crash I would have succeeded! And so, a bottle of vodki may have lost England a whole campaign!"

Tossing the papers into the fire, Allan Law scornfully said: "Cast adrift! Well, I have both gear, place, and money! I am glad that I did not plot Wardlawe's murder, and I would act in the same way again!

"To steal those papers was a fair military game! To murder him would have been an outrage! I may as well mix up here in with the Petersburg whirl! No one cares! And at the last, I can go out with the

Embassy in safety. For I am really a stranger in a strange land now! No longer the right to a secret official protection. 'Je ferai mes malles!' There's the winter hunting, there's always jolly Vienna! I fancy that the American has 'cleared out,' as the Yankees say, and so the Hotel de l'Europe can give me my old room! It's a defeat though, 'all along the line!'

"Outfought, out-maneuvered, out-generaled, and yet, Berry failed on the overland trip, even with Sam Norris to aid him, and the London arrest was a pitiable farce! They found out nothing! Wardlawe is a cool chap, after all, and he deserves his success! I wonder where he is! He is a nice chap enough!"

Two weeks later Major Wardlawe, who had cast his "Gallic disguise" in every way, was a romantic feature of that "one society of St. Petersburg, which meets only at different times and places."

Pouting beauties declared him to be "un ours Americain," and yet, they signaled him back to their feet! His cool courtesy both alarmed and disarmed them! The friendship of the great Ignatieff, the open social fatherhood of the versatile General Annenkoff had been soon noised around.

Only the highest circles knew that he had been for a two weeks a guest at the Grand Duke Michael's palace, and that his mornings were passed with Admiral Chestakoff at the Ministry of Marine.

To be admitted to the "petite cercle" of Madame la Comtesse Ignatieff was the seal of the highest social value.

And still jealously guarded by Paul Kurtz, though a factor in the coterie of the proud English attachés at the clubs, the Opera and in the gilded Vanity Fair, the American Major seemed to be a favored son of Fortune, for no cabal found him in word or deed objectionable.

Toiling under the cabled daily orders of his distant chiefs, he was happy at heart, for both his missions were successful.

In the feverish excitement of the now burning crisis, Wardlawe moved serene and happy! He could say

with the French philosopher, questioned as to what he had done during the Reign of Terror, "J'ai vècu!"

Wardlawe did live in a new world of strangest phantasmagorias. Scenes of dazzling splendor showed him vistas of an indescribable luxury, passion and beauty!

He only realized its full magnificence at the dinner given by General Michael Annenkoff to the flower of the noblesse at his stately home.

Without, the wild March winds howled along the Neva's banks, where, far away, the red battle lanterns burned over the gloomy fortress of Petropavloski.

Within, a hundred and twenty of the children of the gods sat down in the splendidly trophied hall!

Only the Loyal Legion's star shone on Wardlawe's dark attire, where all the other cavaliers blazed in jeweled orders and silken scarfs.

Lustrous-eyed women with "shapely silver shoulders," gazed at the men who had made history, while eyes brighter than the jewels on their breasts looked love to eyes that spoke again!

"The golden age come back again!" mused Wardlawe.

"All that's best of dark and bright!"

With a mischievous smile, Madame Annenkoff had assigned a young goddess with eyes like "the eagle soaring to the sun" to Wardlawe's care.

"You now can talk republicanism!" she said, with a meaning tap of her fan, as she presented her American guest to the Princess Esmè Chilkoff!

Wardlawe gazed timidly at the startling beauty of the woman of twenty-two, whose appellation of the "Beautiful Rebel" was the legacy of a deceased Empress.

Paul Kurtz, at the Opera, had told Wardlawe of the singular history of this Circassian Star. "Her father, a Governor-General of the Caucasus, married a captive Princess, the last of her line, one whose ancestry is lost in the legends of Elburz and Kasbeck.

"Born to enormous wealth and a vast patrimony, the Princess Esmè was educated at the Catherine Institute after the death of her father by a fanatic assassin's hand.

"True to the policy of the Romanoffs, Prince Agar Chilkoff, her only brother, superbly trained, was made a Commander in the Imperial Navy, and so separated from the fierce tribes of his wild birthplace. I have not seen him for four years! He once commanded the Czar's yacht! But the dazzling Esmè, the daughter of the Rose of Circassia, is at once the wonder and mystery of the whole Court! Her princely mother died in the proud seclusion of the splendid castle near Dariel, calmly ignoring even the mighty Czar! This young eaglet—the 'Tcherkess Queen,' they call her—has resolutely declined alliances proposed even by the Autocrat of all the Russias."

"Eagles do not mate in captivity, Your Majesty!" she replied to the mighty Alexander. "Send me back to my mountains!"

Some wild strain of the blood of the fire worshipers—the Daghestan riders, the mountain mystics—makes her as unapproachable as the silvery summits of Elburz! And yet all graces, arts and beauty's gifts cling to her!

"There she is! Judge for yourself!"

On this evening, when Paul Kurtz had remained at home, to hide Wardlawe's especially American antecedents, Major Wardlawe was thrilled by the low musical voice of the fair rebel.

They had glided at once into a strange intimacy as the feast proceeded. "You must tell of your great land! You are free, are you not?" said Princess Esmè. "Only England and our brave America are free! And, only freedom is life!"

"Madame," stammered Wardlawe, "a Russian Princess can hardly understand."

"Stay!" cried the Circassian, transfixing him with her eyes. "I am no Russian! Prisoner here, in gilded chains! They will not let me go! They even control my visits to the Caucasus! They fear that Ayesha's daughter will lift up Schamyl's fallen banner!"

"Your father!" murmured the Major, astounded at such open treason.

"Love has no laws!" coldly said Esmè; "another form of slavery! He was a gallant man! My mother

adored the bravest of her captors! And she reigned in his heart! He was killed because she loved him!"

"No! My fetters are golden!" said the Tcherkess Star. "The Czar steals kingdoms, principalities—they do not rob 'in petto,' these fierce Romanoffs! I have lands, gold, jewels, and yet my wings are clipped! The 'Imperial permission' keeps me here, for I must have it to visit Dariel! I will not ask for it! The Empress will not give it! And my last friend in the Imperial family died with the beloved Czarina, who preceded the murdered Alexander!

"You shall come to me! You shall tell me of your free land! I can never hope to see those blessed countries! I cannot ask to travel abroad, lest I find my wings! And so, I am herded with these gilded slaves!"

Wardlawe shuddered as the defiant Esmè calmly proceeded: "Madame Ignatieff is my one true friend! Her great husband was a courtly captor to my dear mother when Schamyl's last stronghold was stormed! I go often to her home, for the Count Nicholas speaks our beloved Tcherkess tongue! He is my adviser, a wise one. She has told me of you! We must be friends! You will come! I avoid all crowds! Ah! do not laugh! I have an Imperial duenna, one named by the watchful Czar Alexander himself! And I fancy that this good old soul, Baroness Fadaieff, fears me a bit! Yet we are friends!"

Some indefinable impulse made Wardlawe trust this star-eyed rebel. "I am honored, Princess!" he whispered. "But I only wait here for Count Ignatieff's commands. In a few weeks I go to Siberia, to Saghalien—perhaps to examine the upper Amoor River."

There was no mistaking the ghastly pallor of Esmé Chilkoff's face, "You go, so soon, to Siberia!"

"It must be kept a secret!" gravely whispered Wardlawe, recalled from the glamor of her beauty spell. "I should not have spoken!" Here was a Circe à la mode—a Circassian princess speaking the purest English.

Drawing off a magnificent pigeon-blood ruby ring, the Tcherkess Queen dropped it into Wardlawe's hand. Her eyes were blazing with a fire beyond all mere

coquetry when she murmured: "You must come to me! I will send for you! You are with Paul Kurtz, the woman hater! A good man, a true man! Ah! I know! Madame Ignatieff tells me all! That ring was my father's! It was on his sword hand when he died! You shall serve his orphan child! You will not go away without coming to see me!"

Wardlawe gave the pledge of his honor, in his silent eyes.

"I accept your trust of honor!"

Esmè Chilkoff was gloomily silent.

It was only when they lingered as the great feast broke up that she whispered: "Trust to none of these gilded slaves! They all love their chains! Only Natalie Ignatieff is free at heart. She was four years Ambassadress at London! Even her great husband crouches to the Czar! Wait for my summons!

"And in society you can meet me as a friend—'en passant'—that is all! At my prison home—my own palace—you and I will be free in our minds! And you shall serve me!"

Wardlawe raised the slender hand of the Princess to his lips in the Russian adieu de cerèmonie! One kiss—the first—was of mere etiquette; the two others the consecration of his chivalric oath! And yet, in her clearly shining eyes he saw no wanton flame—only the splendid bravery of her fearless nature.

"Remember," she said, with an indescribable glance of entreaty and tenderness, "silence to all, not even Natalie must know! One careless word from you would send me to a far-off residence! So, I trust to an American's honor!"

Escaping from the concert and reception, the causerie of the smoking parlors, the examination of the superb library and arms gallery, Major Wardlawe, with a few whispered words to General Annenkoff, drove swiftly homeward.

His brain was whirling with the exciting confidences of this reigning beauty of the Court!

Not a word to Kurtz dared he speak, or to the Ignatieffs, even to Chestakoff!

"This young eaglet has taken me dangerously near the sun! Have I betrayed myself?" he mused.

He was indignant when he recalled the pleading eyes! Her voice was ringing in his ears, even now!

"If I fall, I fall nobly!" he swore in his heart. "There is a wealth of womanhood there!"

Exquisite in figure, gifted with the haughty grace of her race, her noble features shaded by dark silken hair, the startling beauty controlled by the Asiatic repose of her Circassian ancestry, Esmè Chilkoff had harvested all the advantages of the world's most famous school "pour les jeunes personnes," the Catherine Institute, perhaps only equaled by the Sacré-Cœur.

Languages, arts, graces—all were there—all that Kurtz had spoken of!

"She holds the mirror up to nature—a youthful queen by right divine!"

"I can harm no one but myself!" mused Wardlawe, who felt intuitively that this rare maid was not for him. "If I can serve her, in honor and loyalty, I will —so help me God! The Czar's prisoner, helpless in golden chains!"

He was still dreaming as Kurtz's famous valet, Luigi, stripped him of his furs. Rejoicing in his now complete recovery, he sauntered into Kurtz's supper room.

There was a broiled bone and the click of wine glasses. The Secretary calmly said, "Another service here, Luigi!" as Robert Standiford reached a welcoming hand.

But who was this, in evening attire, calmly rolling a huge cigarette—the man who paused in his story?

"Hello, old chap!" quietly said Allan Law.

"I thought you were back at the Golden Gate."

"So you know each other!" cried Standiford, sinking back in his chair. "Law and myself are great chums in Paris!"

"And I fear the war clouds will blow us both over the border soon!" said the tall North Countryman, reaching out a warmly grasping hand to Wardlawe, who was stricken dumb.

CHAPTER IV.

A BREAKFAST AT THE MARINE MINISTRY.

Two anxious weeks dragged away until the first of April found every human being in the Russian capital quivering in an anxious suspense.

Only the urbane Marshall Jewell, the American Minister, was free to dine and wine both friend and foe in an innocuous impartiality. Wardlawe had taken his courtesy meal, talked American politics and then left the relieved Minister, wondering whether his quiet visitor wished a free passage home or desired to sell locomotives, sewing machines, patent pills or fifteen-inch guns to the Czar! This perfunctory social duty done, Paul Kurtz immersed in suddenly increased work. Wardlawe, Allan Law and Robert Standiford vibrated between Allan Law's parlors at the Hotel de l'Europe, Standiford's own rooms at the Hotel de France, the Yacht Club, and the dashing evening amusements.

The afternoons and evening were given up to these friendly diversions, for the Major desired to conceal the feverish mornings now spent in Admiral Chestakoff's great " salle de reception " down by the English quai.

There, in a corner formed by rich Japanese screens, the old Minister of the Marine had a cosy private nest. A well-spread table adjourned his working desk. A dozen officers always awaited his bell. A company of orderlies on guard awaited his messages, and five hundred telegraphers and clerks, on the three floors above, were busied working with feverish zeal!

All the peculiarities of every American ocean-going boat in the Pacific had been explained.

Sheafs of cablegrams passed between the engineer and his two San Francisco principals, for the whole civilized world, with bated breath, now watched the duel of the Lion and the Bear!

Admiral Chestakoff, a peace lover, piously crossed himself as he recounted to Wardlawe the haughty ulti-

matum of England! The medals and stars clattered on the snowy-haired veteran's heart as he told of the Czar's famous rage at Gatschina Palace!

All the world knew of the fury of the London press, of the day and night work at the dockyards and arsenals of Britain, of the calling out of all the English reserves, of the fifty-one million dollars voted for "instant purposes" of the war with Russia and of the assembly of huge steel clad fleets!

"There is Russia's answer!" said stout old Admiral Chestakoff, as at a window he stood bareheaded, with Wardlawe at his side, while eighteen regiments, fifteen hundred men each, of gray-coated Muscovites trudged cheerily by in the snow, their bayonets twinkling blue, in the pale winter daylight.

The chorus of their wild song, "Life for the Czar!" touched Major Wardlawe's heart.

It recalled the day when, sword in hand, one man of a column of nine solid regiments, he had "marched down Broadway!" And yet though so long ago, it seemed the waving banners, the gleaming bayonets, the wailing martial music—all came back. "The old immortal Soldiers' Chorus of Faust!" sighed the American. "Brave hearts and true! And to-day, England also musters its best!"

"They came to the Czar," growled Chestakoff, puffing his cigarette fiercely, and said: 'England demanded, first, the instant evacuation of Penj Deh! Second, the recall of all our Russian troops! Third, the public disgrace of General Komaroff!' Only a slave could bear that! Even De Giers turned pale as the Council crowded around our Emperor Alexander at Gatschina, in a revolt!'

"What was the Czar's answer, Excellence?" quietly asked Wardlawe.

"We are on the brink of war this very moment! The English Embassy has received the 'twenty-four hour notice'! For the Czar, in rage, raised his mighty arm and struck a heavy malachite table! It flew into a thousand fragments! Princes are fighting for a piece of that table to-day!

"Alexander then swore a mighty oath: 'I will not

give up Penj Deh! I will send forty regiments more to reinforce my troops! And,' he growled, 'I now make Komaroff a Lieutenant-General! Send him one hundred thousand roubles in gold and a diamond-mounted sword! That is my answer!'

"Taking the arm of the Grand Duke Alexis, the Czar then sent De Giers off, with this stern defiance.

"And so the Grand Duke, as head of the Navy, has bade me telegraph orders to extinguish every light on our whole coasts and to close our Asian, Baltic and Black Sea ports!

"Besides, every ingoing and outgoing British passport is cut off! We are on the brink now!

"So, go you to Ignatieff! Tell him that I will send for you through him! And you do not leave your quarters till I send for you, only to go to Ignatieff's! I may wish to send you back to San Francisco instantly! Come here to-morrow at noon without further summons! All will be over then!"

As the sleigh dashed away to the Moika, Major Wardlawe saw proofs of the leakage of official Russia! The streets were all filled with crowds of excited people, and every hotel and café was swarming.

Over the wide world a thousand telegraph instruments were clicking off the wildest rumors!

Admitted by the obsequious butler, Major Wardlawe was at once shown into General Ignatieff's breakfast table.

On the verge of Russia's death struggle, the mighty Tartar diplomat calmly waved his guest to a seat at the table.

"A la bonne heure, Major!" he gaily cried. "I was about to send for you to explain some American political books to me!"

Pale as death, Wardlawe bowed over Madame Ignatieff's jeweled hand, for there, at her side, sat the radiant rebel Esmè Chilkoff, the princess of his dreams, the divinity who as yet had made no sign.

Bowing deeply, Wardlawe did not approach the younger lady, for Allan Law, in irreproachable London morning dress, was calmly pouring out a flood of compliments in Russian to the "Tcherkess Star!"

Law laughed as he bowed to his stupefied friend. "It may be a visite d'adieu, Wardlawe!" he laughingly said.

And then, Madame Ignatieff said, with a consummate grace: "I hope now to return some of your London courtesies, Monsieur Law, for my stay in the foggy city owed much to you!"

"It seems that you know every one, Law," remarked Major Wardlawe, as the young Briton replied with his eyes dreamily fixed upon the Princess Esmè. "I know a whole lot of people; I am a world rover, and yet, I know not those whom I would!"

The luncheon over, the great diplomat carried Major Wardlawe off in triumph to his great library, where the spoil of the literary world was gathered in a vast apartment.

Only for a brief moment, in the anteroom, did the eagle-eyed Circassian recall their secret! "Wait here in Petersburg! I will send for you before you depart! Natalie will watch over us! Remember your promise!"

And yet, all Wardlawe's philosophy vanished when he saw the Countess' magnificent sleigh bearing her away, with Allen Law and the Princess Esmè.

Wardlawe sighed for his lost youth with an involuntary protest.

There was no mistaking the "bright lexicon" of the dialogue of the dark-eyed rebel and the handsome young Englishman.

"I hope that we will not be forced to thrust Law out with the Embassy," musingly said Ignatieff. "He is a charming fellow, very highly connected, and the Countess tells me that he was unwearied in courtesies while she was in London. I knew his relatives here—many years ago—dear and valued friends, now gone!

"And his delightful knowledge of Russian makes him a valuable man and a title in expectancy keeps him from embracing a definite career! He has good ideas, too, and has labored in these last weeks to reduce the bitter friction between the Embassy and De Giers! Their rough ultimatum was very unfortunately

couched! We have too rashly returned the insult in kind!

"Now, we will either fight or negotiate, as seems best. I only sent for you to tell you to wait my directions at home until this crisis is over! I'll send you to the frontier on a special train if we wish you to go west. Be ready!"

On this "day of days" in the Russian capital, Walter Wardlawe was morose at heart as he drove slowly home to the cosy bachelor apartment of Secretary Kurtz.

The young official's days and nights were now spent at his desk, and Wardlawe, Robert Standiford, and Allan Law made a sort of triangular "mess," visiting all the great places favored by the "bon vivants" of the icy capital.

"It is all well that we should separate for the time being," prudently said Paul Kurtz. "Every knot of noticeable people is now closely watched!"

And so Wardlawe, waiting Admiral Chestakoff's momentous decision, accepted the invitation of Standiford, waiting him at the rooms, for a good-by dinner at Pierre Legrand's "Restaurant de la Cour." This ex-chèf of an Emperor was the Delmonico of the town of Peter.

"I have news for you, tidings to open your eyes!" said the arms agent. "Law will be there, for he may go out with me!"

"I hope to God that he does!" savagely cried Wardlawe. "He seems to be neither fish nor flesh, neither Tartar nor Briton; and for his own sake," he more amiably said, "it's just as well that he avoids the upper and nether millstone! There's a mystery about this English-born, Ukraine-bred subject of Queen Victoria!"

"Good fellow for all that!" heartily said Standiford. "I must be off now to Rothschild's Agency! So, seven sharp, at Legrand's!"

Wardlawe blushed, left alone to feel that the bitterness of the "sere and yellow" middle age had prompted this revulsion of feeling at seeing "youth—

not to be denied" seated by the dazzling Tcherkess beauty!

"And with a common language—doubly Greek to me—this boy has me at his mercy! And yet, what is Esmè Chilkoff to me? Only a bright particular star, far above me, as coldly bright as the blue planets swinging over Kasbeck!

"An untranslatable human document! A wild, lawless frontier Queen bereft of her realm and scepter, with her mystic Oriental nature overlaid with the exquisite dissimulation of Russian 'high life!'

"A fearless shooting star, a law unto herself! The heiress of all her mother's mystic lore, hoarded from the dead ages!

"Mes beaux jours sont passés!" sighed Major Wardlawe that evening as he threaded the throng of brilliant diners in the Grand Salle at Legrand's! Not an eye of all these brightening ones led him away from the fair face locked in his heart, the sweet dead woman whose veiled picture hung over his working table at the Palace Hotel.

Once seated at table with Standiford and the debonnair Allan Law, Wardlawe soon forgot his groundless jealousy of the man free to travel a road which was no thoroughfare for him.

The secretive prudence of the three convives had kept each man's secrets, and so Law breathed not the name of the star-eyed goddess in whose company he had visited the Winter Palace with the Countess Ignatieff.

Ignorant of the Englishman's trap set for him at Dünaberg, the American felt bound to Law by gratitude for his manly bearing during the ridiculous arrest at Charing Cross.

"I have no secrets to hide now!" I care for none of his!" mused Wardlawe, and so he joined in the stirrup cups gayly emptied to the general host.

"When shall we three meet again?" cried Standiford as the final effort of Pierre Legrand's "cordon bleu" was laid before them. "It's a good-by to you two men, for there is a hand you cannot see which beckons me away!"

"I fancy, never!" placidly said Allan Law, "unless Major Wardlawe takes the head of the artillery corps with General Annenkoff, who, I hear, will command the Trans-Caspian army which backs up Komaroff!"

"Where in God's name did you hear this gossip?" cried the American.

"At the Winter Palace!" serenely said the Englishman. "A field command will be offered to you!"

"Only to be refused!" gravely replied Major Wardlawe. "All my fighting will be done under the "flag which never goes back!"

"We must hear the chimes at midnight!" broke in Robert Standiford. "I do not dare to confide my good fortune to any one else! But, the great Hotchkiss company does no dealing in the dark! We supply England our cannon, and the Czar knows it! I have waited ten years for the cards to run my way! And the tide of fortune has touched me, at last!

"England's mobilization has been met with Russia's instant purchase of every available gun and cartridge that we have! The goods trains are now loading at St. Etienne, and my commissions on the countersigned order which I telegraphed to-day are a fortune for me!

"A quarter of a million, and I have three months' leave in which to find out if Ethel Raynor is 'of the same opinion still!' The Russian military attachés are inspecting the shipments even now!

"So, I pledge you—'Sweethearts and wives!'"

"God bless you, old man!" cried Wardlawe, whose silent hand grasp attested his gratitude for the promptness of the man who "stood by a strange American" in the hour of his mortal danger.

All this was a sealed book to Allan Law, who gaily said: "Wardlawe and I must make a visit to Outchinikoff's to-morrow, for the future Madame Standiford must know us, if only by name!"

"Agreed!" cried the Major, who remembered a certain superb silver center piece of a wood fairy hidden in lilies of the valley.

"We must meet early, say at nine!" said the Englishman, gloomily. "I have my twenty-four hour

departure ticket in my pocket! I fear that this hideous war will be declared to-morrow! I shall never forget this 12th of March! It will set back European civilization fifty years!"

"Come back to Paris with me, Allan!" said the eager host. "If you'll run over the ocean I'll show you a genuine Yankee wedding!"

The handsome Briton shook his head. "I cannot! I have a little pride left! I do not wish to be hustled out of Russia, for my heart strangely clings to it! But all my early friends are dead and gone—the protectors of my youth!

"To stay would be to seriously complicate my foster brother, Vladimir Platoff, and I would not dare to go back now to his hunting lodge in Poland.

"Colonel Berry gave me a telegraphic tip to get out a few days ago!

"And I find that the other guests of my chum have scuttled away, thus leaving poor Platoff free to join his regiment of the Calvary Reserves!"

"Your friends of the British Embassy here and the Ignatieffs?" suggested Standiford.

"I would not care to assume the hostile character of a man protected by international law!" sighed the Briton. "I have broken bread and tasted salt too often here, under the blue and white St. Andrew's cross in my youth! But 'tout passe, tout lasse, tout casse!'

"I must fare forth! Even the gentle Empress could only obtain me the grace of going out by the pass of Dariel into the Caucasus! I have always wished to see that witchery land!

"From Batoum, I can easily reach Constantinople, and I will have an old Circassian attendant to protect me!

"So my fleeing will not be attended with public ignominy!"

Law's eyes rested upon the American's troubled face.

Pride kept Wardlawe silent, and yet he grumbled: "I wonder if they have ever met before? Or has Madame la Comtesse a plan to break the golden chains of Esmè Chilkoff!"

A vague distrust of Law possessed the American engineer, though he could not give it a firm foundation.

And so he was all armed when the Englishman cordially said: "I owe you a debt of honor, Major Wardlawe! Both Berry and I feel the shame of your rough handling in London! We desire to show you that 'hearts of oak' have a softer side! Let me make a rendezvous with you in London?"

Wardlawe shook his head gravely.

"I have been sufficiently misunderstood! When I have seen the great steel works of Aboukhoff here, with the Whitworth fluid hydraulic process, I will get back to Essen, perhaps to Creuzot, and take the French Line home! The time will yet come when Europeans will learn that an American passport means 'Hands off!'

"No, Berry is a charming host! I thank you. But neither the clutch of the Lion nor the claws of the Bear suit me! My professional tour once done, I will wander back to the Golden Gate. So it's 'shake, and break away!' as we say in America. I doubt if I shall ever revisit England, for I found in Paris that my whole baggage had been ransacked, even the bottom of my black bag taken out! I am a man of no mysteries, and, I despise all double dealing!"

Allan Law laughed nervously. "Oh! I've long been accustomed to French luggage visits, to German letter opening, and a few other things! I've grown callous! But we will meet at the jeweler Outchinikoffs later, give this 'fortunate youth' a breakfast together, and see him off to-morrow night!"

"I will come down to the station," said Wardlawe, "and meet you at the jeweler's; but I have a particular engagement for the morning."

And so for all Standiford's innocent gaiety, a veil of distrust parted the others, as the sleigh deposited them at their respective lodgings.

"We will surely meet again!" warmly said Wardlawe to Standiford, and as he drove home alone he mused: "Singular that Law never mentioned my rail-

way accident! What is he hiding? I can be as dumb as he!"

And Allan Law, smoking his last evening pipe at the Hotel de l'Europe, addressed a few private words to the gilt French clock on the mantel: "We have underestimated this cool American; he is both a shy bird and a cool hand! Good fellow, too!

"Well, the game is made! And is it peace or war?"

The great bell of the Isaac Cathedral boomed two, as he drowsily said: "Cui bono! I have done my best for England and failed! And I must keep out of the fray, far away from the thin red line! For I have done England's secret work and the failure was beyond me! Wardlawe will never know that he lay helpless under Jules Devroche's keen knife! That my scruples saved his life! Confound all drunken Russian engineers and railway 'bumpers!' That golden moment so stupidly lost will never come back again! This elastic 'Amoor Navigation Company' is free to loose its cruisers at will under a legalized pirate flag! And worst of all, Wardlawe now distrusts me! I must fight shy! The Countess Annenkoff might set it right!"

He threw himself down to dream of eyes whose glances now haunted him! "To see her old feudal stronghold will be a dream of her, and perhaps I may be of use to her! Her future alliance? There are the Grand Dukes! I wonder if"—— and then the mantle of Sleep wrapped the defeated young schemer in uneasy dreams.

It was noon the next day when Wardlawe sat at the side of the old Admiral in the Ministry of Marine.

The city was in a convulsion! Every armed servant of the Czar was on duty!

The Champ de Mars, cleared of its snow, was filled with solid blocks of troops! Cossacks, police, hurrying travelers and excited crowds surged in the streets where the isvostchiks swarmed like bees!

At Kurtz's rooms, Standiford, Law, and Wardlawe had broken up their little coterie hastily, for the grave Secretary said: "I only wait now to cable "War"

to our Secretary of State! Standiford, my acknowledgments will meet your bride in due time!"

Wardlawe and Law, keenly watching each other, had never even yet mentioned the name of the Circassian, whose thrilling beauty now enslaved the cool Englishman.

"I have my own adieux to make!" said Law when the wedding presents were duly chosen. "And, I'll meet you at the station to-night; so, au revoir! I am sorry you feel so about the English visit; but I cannot blame you, Major!" and a bright red spot burned on Law's cheeks as he hastened away.

"The only underhand work of my life—the first and last!" he growled, as he drove to the Moika in a resplendent "voiture de remise!"

Around Admiral Chestakoff's breakfast table were grouped that day many officers of the highest rank. A thrilling suspense reigned while the old chieftain, a Sebastopol commander of note, opened the momentary telegrams from the Gatschina Palace!

Major Wardlawe ate his breakfast in an assumed calm, only broken by the general acclamation, when the head of the Naval Ministry said: "Gentlemen, you are dismissed until 2 o'clock! Monsieur de Giers himself is now on his way from Gatschina with the result!"

Pallid but resolved, the crowd of Admirals separated in silence, while the venerable Chestakoff found his teacup tremble in his hand and his cigarette bitter beyond all appetite.

"Remain, Major!" he said, when they were alone. "Your special train is all ready! I myself will send all your personal effects to our Legation at Washington, where they will be forwarded to San Francisco! A French Transatlantic steamer will be delayed at Cherbourg for your arrival! Our Ambassador there has made all arrangements!"

"And my duty to my employers?" said the excited Wardlawe.

"You will have four of our secret agents as an escort to Washington; two to San Francisco. You are only to deliver two letters to your employers and a

bundle of papers to Dimitri Gorlitz, losing not one moment on the way! They are all advised by cipher cable!"

In a weird silence the hands of the clock crawled around. The old Admiral threw himself in a chair before the magnificent portraits of their Imperial Majesties, while the great silent room slowly filled up beyond the screens.

Every man waiting there was the leader of a division of the fleet or a tried commander!

"Great God! How long!" groaned Wardlawe, reviewing his strange voyage from San Francisco, until at last the two great doors were thrown open at the foot of the hall.

The clash of presented arms echoed in the hall when the glittering throng started impulsively to their feet.

Up the long room came tottering, a tall, thin man of sixty, clad in plain black, his silk hat trembling in his hand! No star or order, no button or medal marked the aged Prime Minister of Russia! The face of De Giers was inscrutable as he neared the screens where Admiral Chestakoff stood tottering in his excitement.

"I bring you peace!" the Premier cried in a broken voice as he threw himself on the breast of the venerable sailor.

"It is all over!" gasped the statesman. "The English ultimatum is withdrawn! Their Embassy is ordered to remain! You are to recall the orders to the lighthouses and ports! Light the lights of peace again!

With a quick movement Chestakoff rang his bell thrice. A chief clerk darted from a passageway, portfolio in hand.

"Open all the ports, save those of the military colonies!" solemnly said the Admiral. "Peace is arranged! Relax no vigilance! Arrest all the extraordinary movements for defense!"

Then, stepping out into the hall, the Admiral called the chief officer to his side with a wave of his head.

"Peace! Peace!" he cried. God be thanked! Report at eight o'clock! Absolute silence!" And then

he silently pointed to the Minister of State, standing with tears of joy in his eyes!

When the two dignitaries had found their speech after a frenzied embrace, the vast room was soon deserted.

Suddenly, casting his eyes on the American, the Admiral said: "You have won the victory of your life! I will telegraph to Everett Marsden a duplicate credit of the price to be paid to retain the ships for six months longer, in readiness for our service! You will remain here two months, until I can send you to Dui! Let this time be spent in enjoyment! You need some relaxation; your recompense will come later! Only I ask of you to forget this scene! Noblesse oblige!"

And now the old man cried: "Take my carriage! Hasten to Count Ignatieff! Give him this note! Tell him all! My servant will conduct you! We will meet there to-morrow night, at a private dinner, only the three of us!"

When Major Wardlawe bowed over the little note, the Admiral handed him a golden cigar case. "An Empress's gift!" he smilingly said. "Keep this to remember to-day. Remember, silence!"

Clapping his hands, the old sailor gave Wardlawe over to his waiting Swiss valet, who saluted in silence as the Minister gave the directions.

In a whirl of excitement Wardlawe gazed from the carriage windows at the crowded streets, as the carriage dashed along the roadway cleared of its snow.

"No one as yet knows the good news!" he muttered, speaking as if in a dream.

The American recalled the exact words of the courtly French used by the Prime Minister as he prepared to meet Nicholas Ignatieff.

"Two millions!" he mused, his mind reverting to Marsden's enormous profits.

"For the option of leasing the fleet of this fantastic Amoor Navigation Company! Surely, the victory of a life!"

Leaping from the carriage at the great mansion of the man who never lost a struggle save his battle with the Armenian Loris Melikoff (a brief court favorite),

Wardlawe was amazed as he gazed into Count Ignatieff's splendid library.

Fifty men, the flower of the oldest Russian nobles, were gazing at the intruder when the wary Ambassador led his visitor into a little curtained alcove, whence the graceful Countess could easily signal to her husband, in his library, with the adroitness of the Russian mènage.

Wardlawe's whispered English words were no sooner uttered than the great diplomat grasped the note of his colleague!

With a gesture which left Wardlawe in silence, Nicholas Ignatieff closed the door of his library.

With a beating heart, Major Wardlawe was forced to play the unwilling listener as the sound of two voices reached him from beyond the rich Persian portières.

Too well he knew the voice which had so charmed him at Annenkoff's dinner with the perfect modulated English of the high-bred Russian.

There, in the boudoir of the graceful Countess, the Princess Esmè Chilkoff was again voicing her haughty scorn of these degenerate days!

"Knighthood died with the men who fell around Schamyl at Aul Gunib," the Circassian witch murmured.

"And yet, men live who would die for your slightest spoken word!" was the reply.

Wardlawe flushed with very shame! The speaker was no other than Allan Law

"Yes, to please their own reflected vanity!" sadly answered the Tcherkess Star.

"I would go to the ends of the earth for you!" earnestly protested this mysterious world wanderer.

"I may put you to the test! Be warned! I am of a race which knows no mercy. Men have ever been our slaves—warriors, too! The men of our wild mountains!"

An ominous ring in Esmè's voice startled the harassed listener.

"Trust me, try me, Princess Esmè!" urged the young Lochinvar.

"You shall see my home first! I must know more of you!" sternly answered the hidden beauty. "My service is dangerous! Remember, I hold myself far above all the rules of small womanhood! There is no bourgeoise blood in my veins, no trading boyars, no sleek tchinoviks, no lying courtiers in my ancestry—soldiers, warriors, princes, all! Kings of the mist and the mountain gorge!"

The trampling of feet recalled the agitated American and Wardlawe breathed freer when the ex-Dictator carried him off in triumph to describe the tableau at the Ministry of Marine to the Countess, whose lovely face was now shining as that of an angel!

"You will remain and dine with us; nay, no denial!" said the diplomat. "I must give you your directions for the fall programme. Next year must find, at its close, the great coaling works completed! We will put ten thousand men on the improvements! You have been, Major, the harbinger of a great victory!

"In fifteen years, with our Siberian railway finished, Russia can defy the whole world! Her two foes, England and Japan, will then be powerless! We hold the key to the Pamirs now; we will then wear the crown of Asia, the first cradle of the world!"

"I must be released then early," said Wardlawe, "to see Standiford off!"

"A good friend of Russia!" said the ex-Dictator. "He secured us all the Hotchkiss' arms! Our sudden show of strength has saved us! Your reward is yet to come! I will release you, as I go to the Winter Palace to meet the Privy Council and the Grand Dukes! It is the happiest day St. Petersburg has seen since the fall of Kars and Plevna! And young Law, too, dines with us! I am so glad! He can now visit the Princess Esme's domains in the far-off Caucasus!

Resolutely schooling his face, Walter Wardlawe bowed gravely over the Princess Esmè's jeweled hand as Allan Law conversed in the great dining room with the enraptured Countess.

"To-morrow at ten, you must come to me!" the fair woman softly said; "I need you now! I summon you by my ring, with which you have sworn into my ser-

vice! We will be alone there. I have much to say to you! I must show you my palace!

"Later you shall see the mountain home which is closed only to its mistress! Great God! What a tyranny!"

"You have not needed me, for a fortnight!" stubbornly said the American, his tell-tale eyes turning to where Allan Law, a stately figure, was bending over the hand of the stately Countess.

A rosy glow flushed the Circassian's lonely face, but she impulsively seized both his hands.

"I knew that you were held by your honor! I left you free! Nicholas Ignatieff is my second father! He has told me enough of you! And the Countess trusts me! I am her other heart! Now I need you! You alone! No one must know! Not even these noble ones!

"Be my brother!" she said; "the brother of my heart! For on your help my whole happiness now hangs! Son of a free land! Child of a free flag! You have sworn!"

"And, Allan Law?" smilingly said Wardlawe as he kissed her trembling hands!

"Him, least of all! He is to go forth blinded! Only you and I; none else in the world can know till I release you!"

"Little lady, I am your brother!" sadly sighed the soldier. "I will go to the world's end for you!"

"And my heart and soul will go out with you! Remember, it is a secret pact! And no one shall know of our meeting! He leaves to-morrow!" she said, glancing at the Englishman, "and so, our confidences will be left undisturbed! Not even Natalie Ignatieff knows! It will be you and I against Fate and the whole world!"

During the long dinner Major Wardlawe keenly watched the secretive face of Count Nicholas Ignatieff. The American had been well schooled, and so he devoted himself to the social reminiscences of the graceful English-looking Countess, whiie the man who had juggled with both the Queen and Sultan in the great game for Constantinople communed with himself!

"I will not disclose anything!" resolved the engineer.

It was a strange quintette; but, of the five, two only had eyes for each other!

Allen Law's subjection to the haughty Esmè Chilkoff was touching in its frank self-surrender!

"A matter of temperament, not fate!" mused Wardlawe. "This cool Briton is simply fascinated! His three weeks of frequent absences are easily explained! He is lost to any world but the dark empire of this fair rebel's eyes!

"It was easy to see the relief of Madame Ignatieff, for her husband had lifted the burden of a haunting sorrow from her heart. Only eight years since the flower of Russia had been garnered into the dark grave trenches of Plevna!

But lost in each other, the young couple noted nothing until, with a sigh, Allan Law said: "Major, you and I are to say adieu to Standiford at nine, and then my own exile begins to-morrow. Only memories will be left to bind me to Russia, for the olden ties are snapped and, as an Englishman, I am here against the laws of hospitality—my boyish nurture and even my heart, and yet classed as an enemy to the Czar!"

"You need not hasten away!" gravely said the stern diplomat as he opened a telegram brought to the table.

"The official announcement of an arrangement for peace is to be proclaimed! Here is the Minister of the Interior's sealed confirmation of it!"

"Thank God!" sighed Law, drawing a deep breath of relief, as Esmè Chilkoff sat fascinated as by some spell.

"I will see Minister Tolstoi to-night!" kindly said the General Count Ignatieff. "Give me your passport! He will note a permis de sèjour for six months! There is a great Winter Palace council!"

"And, has England recoiled?" murmured Allan Law.

"We are ready to fight her at the drop of a hat! It may be destiny! It is Fate!" solemnly said Ignatieff. "Your Government balked us at the gates of Constantinople, and the war of the nations is only deferred!"

he sighed. "This quarrel to the death is above even a national hatred! It must come some day—the wreck of matter and the crush of worlds!

"But at this juncture you have recoiled, perhaps only, 'pour mieux sauter!'" the sly statesman said.

"At any rate, you have halted before the Czar Alexander's frank defiance!"

"I am glad of it!" said Law, as his eyes fell before the flashing glances of the Tcherkess Star.

"Do not mistake my natural feelings for rancor, Allan!" said the worn ex-Dictator. "I have seen the sword fail Russia in the hour of its triumph! I knew those who loved you in your infancy! They have all passed away! I myself, will be only a memory soon! It is merely a question of national coherence! Great Britain, with eleven and a half million square miles and three hundred and seventy millions of people, is handicapped by its continental divisions and your two hundred and seventy millions of secret foes in India!

"Though we have but nine millions of square miles in area, and one hundred and fifteen in population, we amalgamate where you lose!

"In twenty years Russia's realms will be knitted together by railways, and we can meet you anywhere with an irresistible force! Peter the Great's will, the Empress Catharine's testament warns us wisely against holding any territories across seas!

"For that reason we sold Alaska; and, built up in violation of the laws of geographical statesmanship, your vast empire will crumble. We are the centralizers of the world!

"There will be two months yet, of by-play, diplomatic juggling, but, the war flags are furled!

"To-morrow the populace will be mad with a seeming triumph!"

The Count whispered a few words to Madame Ignatieff and disappeared, saying, with a meaning smile: "I think that we will keep Law here, at least for a time!"

"And you, Esmè?" hazarded the happy Countess, freed from the war cloud's dark spell.

"I care not!" the haughty Circassian defiantly said.

"England and Russia are the arch robbers of the modern world! Let them fight or not, my country is enslaved, its name blotted from the face of the earth! Only the air is free there, and Alexander Romanoff forbids me to breathe it!"

"Beautiful Prometheus!" Do not struggle with your chains!" kindly said the Count. There was no purpose in that incessant warfare of your wild land! I have seen five long wars, and the Caucasus campaigns were the most horrible!"

"You make a solitude and call it peace!" quoted Esmè, her eyes filling with tears.

"Strange human being!" sighed Madame Ignatieff as she drew Wardlawe away. "A royal nature, born above all laws! A queen by right divine, a peerless human soul! Disdainful of all, and yet some Moses, one day, will smite the rock of her defiant heart! Love is the only modern sorcery! Even the Czar fears her! For she would go even to the block proudly and without a word! The wrongs of her race are her dower! She will not be enameled into a 'dame de la cour.' And she could even be an Imperial Grand Duchess! Now, you are my prisoner, Sir," the gracious woman said.

"May transforms this dreary winter city! Nicholas tells me that you will be kept here and Admiral Chestakoff wishes you to know the inner life! The vast river, with this wilderness of palaces, bridges, fleets, forts, squares, streets and gilded domes; the museums, churches, operas and theatres are not St. Petersburg!

"I am to be the Una to lead you, an American lion, through the jungles of our wild-hearted society.

"You will see it, seething now in a mad joy, for the people will feel that we have thrown the gage down to proud England and for once stayed its power!

"So, now you belong to myself, and our passionate mountain goddess!

"Esmè is a hostess par excellence, and the Baroness Fadaieff, her duenna, is the widow of an old friend! This wild child really lives here, though her establishment, 'the Czar's jail,' as she calls it, is a most princely one! Prepare, Sir, to be a Squire of Dames!"

"Allan Law?" said Wardlawe, raising his eyebrows significantly.

The Countess laughed. "Esmè has some strange quest of her own, upon which she will send him 'pour encourager les autres!' Her suitors are numberless! And she is a fleet Atalanta! No one has been able to match her Georgian stride! A beautiful whirlwind, and, withal, womanly and tender—a golden heart!"

"I am yours to command, Madame," dutifully said Wardlawe.

"And in this you will find your protection!" whispered the hostess, "for, you have risked your very life for us! Remember, never lisp the name of this shadowy Company! It might lead on to a defeat, to a catastrophe! And by obeying me your voyage to Saghalien will be a princely progress! There is a fascination in lonely Siberia which is like the cool air of the Alps—a breath of Heaven!"

"I shall be your obedient charge, Madame!" solemnly said the American; "your willing subject!"

When the sleigh was announced to bear the two men to the Moscow station, Wardlawe was forced to overhear the Princess Esmè's adieu. "I shall see you here to-morrow!"

And Allen Law bowed his head in silence. "I will put your fine phrases to the test!" the fair Circassian said.

"To the end of the earth!" said the calm Briton, raising her hand to his lips.

With a deft gracefulness, Countess Ignatieff led Law away at an imperceptible signal of the fair Esmè.

"You will come to me to-morrow, my brother!" whispered the Circassian, laying a burning palm in Wardlawe's outstretched hands!

"He must only see me here, with Natalie Ignatieff, this young English madcap! But you shall share the splendors of the Czar's golden prison with me! Paula Fadaieff will adore you! She loves serious men! My home is my castle! Be my real brother! Share my golden chains!"

"Your brother, the Prince Agar?" seriously said the American.

"It is of him that I would speak!" the radiant woman said, a finger on her lip.

"But not a word now! You will be safe only under my roof to name him! Not even Natalie or the Count; to the Englishman, never! Do not even speak Agar's name! I am sending my old retainer Ali Roustan down to Dariel for his annual visit of surveillance!

"And the Englishman can easily go with him, and so, bring his own head safely back! I only sent him away to be alone with you!" she said, with a noble womanly frankness.

"You are my last hope; you are a part of my life now! You are not even to speak of me to Allan Law!"

"To-morrow, to-morrow, then, at ten!" faltered the Major, as he followed Law into the corridor.

"This is an astonishing turn of affairs!" quietly said Law as the two men seated themselves in the sleigh.

"And a juncture not to be freely discussed, I imagine!" moodily said Wardlawe.

"You are right!" the young man said. "I'll race back and see the fellows of the Embassy at Viatelli's. 'Paul Kurtz gives them a good-by dinner there! Our Ambassador has quietly taken "seven days leave" so as to force the Secretary of the Embassy to 'demand the passports.' I am glad to get out of here for a time.

"The madness of the anti-English fever would make it dangerous for me to stay, and I do not care now," he soberly said, "to throw my life away in a useless duel! So, I will slip away to the Caucasus! And sans adieu! It has been a hot corner for the last two weeks!"

Half an hour later Standiford's train glided away, the good fellow beaming with his good fortune!

"It is best," murmured Allan Law, "that you should not be identified with me any longer, Wardlawe! I know the resentment of these same smiling patricians! Look at that knot of guard officers! All ready to fight à l'outrance! Alas! It's the same in London!

"Now, as you say you go away soon, I may not again

meet you! I owe you some amends, and when we meet later—for the world is strangely small—you must let me pay both Berry's debt and my own!"

"It must be in San Francisco, then," said Wardlawe severely, "for, I did not have fair play in England!"

Law started and colored deeply.

"Oh, the dynamite craze!" he stammered. "Certainly, for, of course, you take no sides in this great international hatred!"

"The only quarrel I espouse is that of my own country!" said the Major, bowing deeply. "America needs all her sons; and so I'll say good luck and a fair field and no favor!"

"We shall surely meet again!" lightly said Allan Law. "For you will have yet much to do with Russia, and I am tied by golden chains to this land of strange mysteries!"

Left alone, Major Wardlawe mechanically called a single sleigh. A polyglot attendant enabled him to order a tour of the great throbbing city within the canal line. It was a night of the wildest excitement!

"Safe at last!" he said as he breathed a sigh of deep relief.

"Paul Kurtz is a mere mail bag for me, though, the best of good fellows! Sleepy old Marshall Jewell suspects nothing, and I fancy that both my home principals are more than satisfied. They should be!

"The great coal works will be only an opening for the National! Thank God, I am rid of this stranger who travels under two hostile flags! The Honorable Allan Law is a dangerous friend—and for all that he knows he may be only the tool of keener minds! If he has been playing any double game the Ignatieffs will soon discover it! As for the Princess Esmè, she will raise this young turtle to a high altitude and then dropped from the eaglet's claws, he will be dashed in pieces! He flies no manly colors! Berry, at least, was an 'out and out' Briton, with no false sailing papers!"

His strange dislike of Law seemed to date from the advent of the Tcherkess goddess!

Stifling a sigh, Wardlawe mused: "And yet Standiford said he was a thorough-going good fellow! So he may be, in Paris, or London! I wish he were there now!

"I have nothing to fear now, for the Countess Ignatieff is a mighty social power, and her husband and Chestakoff are rocks of abiding strength!"

And so, Wardlawe visited all the great evening sights of the excited metropolis.

It was at the Winter Garden that Surgeon Pauloff left a box party of friends to grasp his patient's hand!

"I know all!" whispered the delighted old veteran. "You are to dine soon with the Grand Duke, who wishes to meet the man to whom Russia owes so much! This is the revenge for Sebastopol, for the English fleet at Besika Bay! We will conquer, à la fin! Remember, it will be a sans ceremonie dinner!"

When Wardlawe awoke the next day St. Petersburg was in a tumult of wild joy, and Paul Kurtz, exhausted by the week's suspense, was sleeping the sleep of the just as his guest sent Luigi for a "voiture de la première classe.

With peculiar feelings the American opened a superb smoking-set, a gift fit for a prince, which bore Allan Law's card of adieu.

"This was Outchinikoff's masterpiece!" wonderingly said the Major, "Wherein have I contributed to this youth's well-being?"

But in a singularly studied elegance of array, the veteran drove slowly down to the silent palace where the Princess Esmè kept the stately seclusion next to the Annenkoff mansion, beyond the Summer Garden of the Czarina.

Fifty miles away, Allan Law, gazing at the quaint garb of his stern old Tcherkess companion, mused. "I owed Wardlawe some acknowledgment!" he mused. "For, but for the chase of his unknown dispatches I would never have worn this goddess' golden chains."

And in the slavery of his lonely mind he knelt before the throne of the captive mountain queen.

"Life has a definite purpose for me now!" mused

Law as he thought of the grandly simple motto, "Ich Dien!"

Major Wardlawe, bewildered, walked through the splendors of Esmè Chilkoff's home until he faced waiting woman in that boudoir which was the envy of an Empress.

The fair rebel frankly received him with both hands extended.

In the perfunctory courtesies of a presentation to the demure Baroness Fadaieff, Wardlawe recalled Princess Esmè's agitation at the mention of her brother.

"Is the same conspiracy on foot?" murmured the cautious American. "Some scheme to detach the mountain fortresses of Circassia to Turkey, backed by the irresistible English fleet?"

Even in his brief residence he had heard weird stories of Agar Chilkoff's haughty magnificence, of his personal beauty and his mental fearlessness.

The idol of women, the feared and envied of men!

And what foreign service of moment claimed this son of an untamed imperial womanly nature, the fiery Circassian mother who had defied all the seductions of the Romanoffs!

And many disquieting thoughts harassed Wardlawe as he followed the capricious beauty through the stately drawing-rooms, the magnificent galleries of her home.

Laughingly, Esmè noted how the good Baroness Paula had given up the chase, and betaken herself to her French novel, and was soon deep in a cigarette and lost in Henri Grèville.

"Even spies tire out, you see!" gaily said Esmè. "We are alone at last, and when you have broken my bread and tasted my salt you can listen to me! Allan Law is gone?" she mischievously queried.

"I presume that you saw him after I did!" remarked Wardlawe, gazing at the glowing face of the triumphant woman.

"I did! I sent him away, and he will not escape from Ali Roustan! I intend to keep you apart, for the present!"

Esmè saw the clouds in Wardlawe's eyes.

"Listen, Major!" she said. "I have few secrets from Count Ignatieff and Natalie! Only one, and it is our business, my brother!" was the softly uttered conclusion. "Law is of fine family, a man of mark! He is high-spirited! And not here now, under the protection of the grade of attaché! He would have been slain in a duel in a few days but for our pious deceit in sending him off! The deadly Colonel Sacha Menchikoff had sworn to avenge the insult of the British ultimatum upon this spirited youth! Menchikoff is a cold Tartar murderer. He has already killed a dozen men. And I have future uses for Law! I reserve him for myself! It is different with you! To you, I give my whole heart! Count Ignatieff had the brutal Menchikoff ordered away to Tomsk forthwith, and Law is half way to Moscow now. If they had met, there would have been bloodshed. After the breakfast we will talk business, you and I!"

"Business!" cried the astounded American.

"Yes! I have important affairs!" demurely said Esmè. "Among other things, I inherited from my father the control of the 'Amoor Navigation Company!'"

Wardlawe stood spellbound.

"It is some gigantic conspiracy!" he muttered. "I may wreck both Sterling Mott and Marsden here! Can this woman be an Imperial spy set on to test my prudence?"

"I do not understand you!" he said cautiously.

"You will, when I explain! Paula Fadaieff always nods after luncheon!" she laughingly said.

To the amazement of the visitor, in all the bewildering vistas of the palace he had seen neither the pictured face of the great Governor-General Prince Boris Chilkoff, nor the mystic Ayesha, whom the mountaineers still adored. Neither the portrait of the absent Prince Agar, nor that of the bewitching woman at his side, not even the Czar and Czarina.

Stranger still, neither pictured landscape nor statue enriched this Oriental labyrinth of luxury.

And then, reading his thoughts, the beautiful Esmè

said simply: "I am a Mohammedan! We make no pictured likenesses nor graven images!"

Laughing merrily at Wardlawe's dismay, Esmè Chilkoff gravely said: "Can you wonder that I adhere to the belief which left my mother a splendid jewel of truth and beauty? Boris Chilkoff never asked Queen Ayesha to forswear our family faith! And here in Russia, the Church is both tool and ally of the Crown! As in England, it is a solemn adjunct of the throne, its pathway, a beaten road to success for the common herd! The stars of Kasbeck shone on my cradle! They gleam always in my heart! I am a child of Allah, blending the creeds of the Fire Worshiper and Mahomet—beliefs, not creeds!

"Natalie Ignatieff will show you the golden luxury of the salons of the Neva—these women with hearts of fire and breasts of snow!

"I will unveil to you later the gulfs of wretchedness in Imperial Russia!"

Reading his thoughts, she solemnly said: "Nay! I am no Nihilist! It is the code of the narrow-browed fool, the creed of nothing! Only blood and death follows its dark cult! I am free and a 'true woman!'

"For me there are no laws but God's favor, my Allah—your God—and the promptings of my heart! I am Ayesha's child! I bear her picture graven in my heart, and at night, alone under the stars, my mother talks to her lonely child!"

An hour after the gay chatter of a perfect luncheon, Esmè Chilkoff led the wondering American to the library.

"Listen," she said; "you will leave here by the end of May! You go direct to Dui, by Nagasaki! I know all! Do not ask me how! I have made you my brother! You wear my father's ring! And your word has been pledged to me!"

Opening an escritoire, she drew out a roll of drawings and a packet of papers.

"Here is our secret!" she said. "My noble father left us a vast estate—Ayesha also had princely possessions. My brother Agar is not here! I cannot reach him!

"Our natures are blended, and we have no secrets from each other! He is far away—on the Czar's business! And I know not when he returns!"

Her eyes were as dark as the wintry flow under the blue ice, as she said: "Boris Chilkoff, when Governor-General of Eastern Siberia, became almost the sole owner of the first 'Amoor River Steam Navigation Company.' Its original franchises are mine, the sole property of myself and Agar! Twenty steamers built in England, a dozen bought on the Pacific coast were sent out there, and these are great interests of our house.

"The local agents, the officials, the banded Muscovite thieves, have been for years plundering our patrimony!

"Mark you, all my wealth here, all our possessions in Circassia are exposed to the clutch of the Czar!

"Both Agar and I may be left beggared by his slightest official misstep, or by my refusal to marry an officially designated bridegroom!

"Dear as are the Count and Countess Ignatieff, they are still, at heart, Russians!

"As I cannot leave this land, I must act through others! I wish to send a secret agent this season to make an inspection of the whole region and to observe all the workings of this nefarious scheme to let our franchise lapse!

"Baron Knorp is my true friend—noble, serene, brave, and yet, a loyal Russion! Fear chains all these people! I must be able to effect all my own designs without complicating or involving my beloved Agar!

"To this end, I wish a steamer constructed—here are the plans, every direction, and the list of supples!"

Wardlawe gazed in amazement at Esmè, who calmly continued:

"While I cannot leave Russia I have secretly withdrawn great sums of money—mine and Agar's—through Baron Sternberg, of the Rothschilds! He is my secret banker, through his personal agents here, and he knows the real value of this antiquated concession, a value doubling yearly!"

"I know him!" soberly said Wardlawe, still

wrapped in astonishment. "I have confidential relations with him!"

"The Jews are the real masters of Russian finance, behind all these gilded shams!" said the Princess. "He and his fellow-religionists owe an undying debt of gratitude to Ayesha.

"I wish you to send the papers on instantly to San Francisco, to the National Works! Let this boat be built by night and day labor, so as to be ready to leave with all the supplies on your arrival. It can be carried on deck between the masts of the annual supply boat of Freeman Smith & Co. to Nicolaievsk.

"And twenty thousand pounds will suffice for the whole enterprise. Here is London exchange for that amount!"

"How can I aid you, Princess, beyond hastening this construction? I can telegraph to the Works, they will begin fifteen days from now. We will easily built it in a month! But I do not go to the mouth of the Amoor! I only go to Dui, on the island of Saghalien, via Yokohama and Vladivostock!"

"You will only assume the entire business responsibility!" placidly said the Princess. "The boat and supplies will be shipped all prepaid 'To order.'

"This done, before you sail to Vladivostock, you will be met by an agent of mine at Nagasaki, who will relieve you of all!

"Baron Knorp and the Admiral governing the Littoral at Vladivostock will secretly aid you.

"But I am not to be known in the whole transaction. It would create a storm here. It might consign me to close seclusion and so defeat my purposes! My brother must not know! It might prove his official ruin! And he must never know the agent whom I send there!"

She ceased speaking! Her eyes burned into his very soul!

"I trust you with more than my life!" she said.

"And why?" murmured Wardlawe.

"The man who risked his life four long years for the flag of the free will not betray a defenseless girl!" said Esmè.

"Baron Sternberg has advised me! Dimitri Gorlitz is his San Francisco secret agent. The rich Jews control the Alaska Fur Company and its Russian prototype, and so, the millionaire Jew and the American soldier must guard the Mohammedan girl! The world is small indeed!

"Remember, it would be an end of our princely house, the ruin of Agar and I were this scheme known! Sternberg sent me these plans on from Yarrow and Thornycroft!"

"You are a genius, Princess Esmè!" cried Wardlawe.

"But tell me, is there no other Amoor Navigation Company?"

The soldier's voice was vibrant with emotion.

"None!" firmly said Esmè, "and all the papers of the original franchises are now deposited at Frankfort-on-the-Main, under the seal of all the Rothschilds, the men to whom kings bend, and without whom, even Emperors cannot make war!

"But in the thirty years since Boris Chilkoff obtained the seal of the Emperor Nicholas upon the vast concession, a hundred abuses have crept in! And any one—every one—uses the name of the Amoor Navigation Company; and in Siberia it is the cloak of a hundred guilty officials.

"My chosen agent, secretly examining all, will return, without remark, and reporting to Baron Sternberg, the vast combination of the Rothschilds will thus aid me to reclaim and to reacquire all the rights.

"Two Czars have almost forgotten the existence of such a company! There is only a dim tradition of the Ministry of the Interior and of Domains that such an organization is still in force.

"Will you be my one active ally? I know, Major, even of your great history! You have lost your wife, your other self! I, my mother, and I am now only the living Ayesha! In this way I will save the only great interest which is secured to Agar and myself! I hold our capital hoarded aboard, subject to our joint order! Alas! Neither he nor I can ever reach it to enjoy it! He is even now kept abroad on secret service! It is

the Kings of Gold against the Autocrat of all the Russias! Our lives, our visible estates here, are all subject to the Czar's will, and the Privy Council holds Circassia as the Gate of the Empire!

"To be given away with a marriage ring to some creature of the Crown, I never will consent!

"And I must now learn to be a Russian in dissimulation, for my open resistance would either mean Agar's death or his 'mysterious disappearance.'

"So, you see, I am the living pawn for the loyalty of the whole Tcherkess tribes!

"And the arbiter of my brother's fate! Will you be the brother of my heart? I offer you only toil, without recompense, perhaps danger; but, you will have a Circassian girl's gratitude!"

"I am your brother to the death! silent, loyal true!" swore Wardlawe.

"Now you are my Ahmed!" she said. "I give you the name of the dear first born brother who died by the Russian sword. He lives again in you!

"Listen! Send these off through Paul Kurtz, in the Legation bags! You can telegraph orders later! I have Sternberg's cipher to Consul-General Dimitri Gorlitz! You can use him! I can trust him so far, for without Sternberg's influence Gorlitz will never be a Minister! The Rothschilds are the private treasurers of the Imperial Family in all their morganatic marriages! We find safety only outside of Russia, up to the Czar and Czarina on the throne! You must now merely give me the passing notice of society!

"You will come here in future only with Natalie Ignatieff!

"But we can have seclusion at her home always! Her boudoir is the safest place in Russia! Only, beware of your American frankness! To dissimulate is the very primer of Russian life!

"Ignatieff, Allan Law, Kurtz, Chestakoff—even the Countess—a word let fall in carelessness might betray and forfeit my liberty and Agar's life! It is the only weapon to protect our independence that I can find, this secret alliance with the men of gold!"

"There is no treasonable design, no revolution hidden in this?" said Wardlawe solemnly.

"I owe a sacred duty to my secret employers, who handle millions, and they must keep faith with the Czar!"

"By Allah! No!" cried the gallant girl as she crossed her hands on her heaving bosom!

"How will you explain our close intimacy to Madame Ignatieff?" doubtfully remarked Wardlawe.

"She shall be led to fancy that you please me!" murmured Esmè, with her eyes cast down in a sudden confusion.

"I so deluded her with this English boy, the British youth with a Russian mask. Name him to no one, but he is sacred to you, for he is my friend. I have seen fit to encourage him to outwit the Count Nicholas, who does me the honor to watch me—all too closely; and we both decided to save his life—Natalie and I."

And now, clapping her hands, she cried. As you will never see me dance in public, no! not for a Czarina—I will show you a Circassian maiden's love confession!"

When a beautiful Georgian appeared, beginning a wild prelude upon a strange lute, catching up a scarf Esmè Chilkoff glided into the center of the room.

Five minutes later she threw the scarf down and stood transfigured and glowing before the bewitched American.

"Are you of the earth, Princess?" he rapturously cried.

"Only a Circassian girl chained by the Neva, here in a golden prison, but, pining always for her mountain home!"

'Go now, Ahmed!" she cried. "You are mingling your life with mine! For you are now sacred by the name of brother! And you carry in your heart the lives of Ayesha's children! See how I trust you!"

She kissed him on the forehead, and with a noble dignity, said: "Our lives flow on together in this sacred pact! Until to-morrow, at Ignatieff's!"

BOOK II.

A STRANGE ALLIANCE.

CHAPTER V.

"WE WILL MEET AGAIN SOON!"

Four weeks from the Czar's openly expressed defiance of England, Major Wardlawe was a favorite in the inner circles of the whirl by the Neva! Though the English Parliament still growled, and shipyards hammered, fleets paraded, orators vociferated, and money was poured out, the grim clutch of the Bear was firmly fastened on the Key to India!

Wise diplomats found the easy way of a "modus vivendi," and then, an accommodation to the difficulty to ease down he excited passions of the British public.

With a grim smile, Nicholas Ignatieff said: "Peace at last! Gladstone's Ministry is breaking up, and 'impotent godliness' will give way to the intelligent Philistinism of the robust Salisbury! One is never safe with a reformer; they may at any time blunder into any moral crime!

"But Salisbury is a sensible pyramidal fellow! Symmetrical from every point of view! It is now 'panem et circenses' instead of blood and 'the imminent deadly breach!'"

Plunged into a career of fascinating social pleasures, Major Wardlawe now spent his mornings in the detailed instructions of planning the great coal works! His afternoons were passed with the sister of his heart, the fair Tcherkess rebel, whose frank womanhood astounded him! Allan Law's name, however, was

never mentioned, and Wardlawe had received no news of that disturbing young rival.

For he had early learned the useful lesson of forgetting the pen while in Russia.

Beyond the safe medium of Paul Kurtz's dispatch bags, Wardlawe's only communications were the laughing challenges of passionate Russian eyes.

Some inner current of confidential gossip had stamped him as one who was in an unfathomed way a loyal friend of the Russ, and so, many an eye grew brighter at his coming!

With a mischievous sense of self-protection, the now radiant Esmè sent her adopted "brother" into warmer corners than even the "rebel works at Petersburg."

"You owe me something, Ahmed!" she whispered, in one of their daily conferences in Natalie Ignatieff's deserted music room.

"You cannot make love to dear old Chestakoff, to that confirmed woman hater, Paul Kurtz, only devoted to art, to the great Nicholas, and Madame Natalie is serenely seated 'in the heights,' above us all! You must appear to make love vigorously, if only to support your name as 'un cavaliere galantuomo.'

"So here is your ronde des visites: Countess Nadine Aprakine, Baroness Alexi Laska, the French Ambassadress—I permit you to adore all these!"

"And, if I am taken seriously," gaily cried Wardlawe.

"Then I will come in and cut you out under the enemy's guns!"

They were both happy, for the cable had announced that the "Water Witch" would be ready before Wardlawe's arrival.

In these days of budding April, the Ice King was slowly relaxing her grasp on the Neva and Wardlawe yearned to be off for San Francisco.

"Patience, patience!" laughed Chestakoff and Ignatieff. "But four weeks more! We are marking every movement of England's forces and fleet!

By the middle of May we will know if we can safely

trust five millions of dollars to the covering fortifications of Dui.

"And we will not alarm our English rivals by any seeming undue activity! Give yourself up to enjoyment! Russia may go forward slowly; but she never goes back!

"A taste of our magic May and then you can hasten off! It will bring you to San Francisco by June first and to Saghalien by July fifteenth, as early as you can operate there! Three months will suffice you for your first work!"

Lost in the whirl of a never ending gayety, which aroused the suspicions of even the blasé Paul Kurtz, the American panted to be away upon the secret quest of the dark-eyed Tcherkess.

In Esmè's eyes a somber slumbering fire now burned, for the cable had brought her the promise of Dimitri Gorlitz to have the "Water Witch" on its way to Nicolaievsk by June fifteenth.

"And, Ahmed," she whispered, "I count the days, for the sooner you go the safer our project will be! And you will then return to me next winter, crowned with success!"

"If I live, Esmè," sighed the American.

"Fulfil my wishes and you shall see Circassia as my private guest; for when I have succeeded, do you not see, my brother, that I can make my own terms with the Czar?"

"Through the Rothschilds?" cried the astonished American.

"This financial alliance, when sealed by my reasserted privileges sold to them, will release Agar from the secret servitude of the Navy, a translation ingeniously devised only to separate us, and it will insure my freedom!

"It will mean freedom for us both—we will pass out from under the yoke! But, one false step! Ah! God! What horrors would follow!"

Wardlawe was amazed at the sudden torrent of tears which veiled her splendid eyes.

Left alone, he said: "The Countess Ignatieff is right! Esmè Chilkoff is as wild a nature as Diana of

old! And as a woman, still to me a riddle! Only the 'round and top of sovereignty' would fitly reward her superb and undaunted courage."

Society saw her, splendidly framed, merely as a distant and resplendent star! Less than the presence of the Czarina or the Grand Duchesses, she never honored, save when visiting with Madame Ignatieff! she impartially visited all the Embassies in stately guise.

At the Court Theatre, the Opera, on the Island—a dream of beauty—she turned disdainful eyes upon the crowding suitors who sighed in vain.

"Allan Law has foolishly gone on to Turkestan!" suddenly said the Count Ignatieff one day as the quartette sat at dinner. "I have had a telegram to send him as escort to Merv!"

A mysterious smile curved the lips of the Princess Esmè. And yet she gave no sign!

Old Ali Roustan had returned, but the grim Circassian, following his princely mistress, silently made no mention of the young wanderer.

"He has passed out of her mind!" mused Wardlawe. "Her pathway is over human hearts! It is the time of roses with her! And no one has as yet found the open sesame of the wild heart!"

Before the end of April, Major Wardlawe was fully equipped with the instructions of both Admiral Chestakoff and the indefatigable Count Ignatieff as to the Dui works. "Centralization is a wonderful force, even if it abridges the individual liberty," mused the engineer.

For, seated in the Marine Department, he discussed, in detail, with the venerable Minister the superb skeleton maps, plans and charts sent on from Dui, across Siberia, by an Imperial courier.

"How easy to work these seeming wonders!" calmly said the Admiral. "We send our best talent professionally to Siberia, the officers receiving double pay and promotion. The offenders who, in other lands, are mere civil ciphers, dead to the world, immured at useless or fantastic toil, are poured over there to be human buffers in breaking the ice of ages.

"Even the talented convicts are used in all their special callings.

"These superb maps were made by an ex-Colonel of Engineers who murdered a beautiful Hungarian prima donna, five years ago, through a lover's jealousy here! We treat him well there; he is only excluded forever from the order which he has disgraced.

"And Russia well knows how to moderate the lash! Pray observe, Major Wardlawe, that all these bugaboo stories of Siberian horrors are of purely English origin!

"If you wish to compare our penal system with the horrors of Olmutz, Spandau, Sainte Pelagie, Cayenne, Botany Bay, the dens of Italy or the prison shambles of America, I will give you a few official Russian reports.

"As for Siberia, my happiest days were passed commanding the fleet at Vladivostock, the Gate of the East.

"And Siberia has been the nursery of many of our ablest men! The great Muravieff was the father of our Siberian policy in 'fifty to fifty-six.'

"It is that wonderful genius, Nicholas Ignatieff, who devised our whole Chinese policy from 'sixty to sixty-five'!

"Study well that man's character! Fresh from his victories in the Caucasus, he went to China and Siberia, and his genius has supplemented and extended the sacred wills of Peter and Catherine! He gave us the southern ten degrees of latitude by his treaty with Prince Kung; he secured for us Possiette Bay, Emperor's Bay, peerless Vladivostock and then, pointed to Saghalien Island, as our one coal supply! You are only working his will when you open the inexhaustible coal mines of Dui to our fleet! The Japanese at Nagasaki have the only other available coal on the Pacific."

"A wonderful man!" sighed Wardlawe.

"Yes!" said Chestakoff.

"Never outwitted but once, and that was when Loris Melikoff pandered to the late Emperor's love for the Princess Dolgourouki.

"Ignatieff is the one living martyr of Russia! It

was Alexander II. who in a fit of moral weakness abandoned the great Peter's policy when the gates of Constantinople lay open to us!

"And then he dropped Ignatieff, a victorious Dictator, to please the angered people, robbed of their greatest spoil of victcory—Saint Sophia!

"This, too, at the whim of a bright-eyed girl!

"But the great Czar died later by violence! Loris Melikoff followed, by poison or suicide, in exile; the Princess Dolgourouki has been chased away into Germany, and Minister Tolstoi is only Ignatieff's pupil! Nicholas Ignatieff lives to be the Nestor of Russian policy!

"And he is far abler than Gortschakoff or De Giers, mere men of the Chamber! Soldier, statesman, diplomatist, courtier, Nicholas Ignatieff has been the Richelieu of Russia.

"It is he whose finger points us now to Peking!

"Our present Czar has the private map traced by Ignatieff, with all of Corea, all of Manchuria, the Yellow Sea and Port Arthur in our hands!

"Can you not see that with our railway finished, with the feeders crawling into China, that in three generations we will disintegrate and absorb China as we have all of Asia save Hindustan!

"China's one million and a half square miles, its four hundred millions of people will make the Russian Empire greater than the English domains, and it will be laced together by railways!

On interior lines we can baffle the British; the rest of the world must then let us alone!"

"Germany!" doubtfully said Wardlawe.

"We will balance France against that!" energetically said Chestakoff! See here on the Neva! One hundred and seventy years ago this was a lonely marsh!

"To-day it is the Northern Paris!

"In a century, all China will be dominated by Russia.

"Napoleon, our faithless foe, who was balked of a Russian marriage by the Emperor Alexander yielding

to his mother's dislike, said: "In fifty years, all Europe will be Republican or Cossack!

"The great Peter pointed to the feeblest opponents for his extension!

"In one hundred years all Asia will be Russian, save Hindustan, fenced off by the Himalayas! Ignatieff is only a later Peter the Great! Study him! The world should never lose such a man!"

"England's opposition?" anxiously said Wardlawe. "She grows weaker every year, we stronger! I will quote one of their own classic poets:

"'Ill fares that land,—to hastening ills, a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay!'

"Look at Ignatieff's giant mind! It was he who devised the idea with the American Consul-General Collins, in 'fifty-four,' of placing steamers on the Amoor, to run as far as the Shilka, nearly two thousand miles!

"That brilliant Governor-General, Boris Chilkoff, was energetically beginning this, when the knife of an assassin laid him low!

"And so the first 'Amoor Navigation Company' became only a traditional name! It may be something yet!"

Wardlawe was trembling, lest the secret of his heart should be unveiled.

"We have used the elastic name in this trying juncture," smilingly said the Admiral, "and with good judgment, for twenty ocean steamers will soon ply from San Francisco and San Diego, from Portland, Tacoma and Seattle to Nicolaievsk, Vladivostock, Saghalien and Port Arthur when the railway is done. All, all of this we owe to Ignatieff!

"Our able secret agent at San Francisco is Dimitri Gorlitz, soon to be promoted a Minister! On his return he will bring the whole plan, which he is working up with your capitalists, Sterling Mott and Marsden."

"This is a gigantic scheme!" said the astounded American.

"Yes, and it would have been carried through

sooner if the Government had left Ignatieff as Ambassador in London!

"After his career in the Caucasus, China, Turkey and at Vienna, he saw the need of ready money for our various enterprises.

While the Czar cannot officially ally himself with the great Israelite kings of the London, Amsterdam, Paris, Frankfort, Berlin and Vienna money markets, Ignatieff devised a way to baffle the hatred of the organized Greek Church for the Jews.

In London, his friendship with Montefiore, with the Rothschilds and other great Semitic capitalists made him really an Ambassador to the whole Jewish nation!

"While Ignatieff was Dictator here, Baron Sternberg, as local agent, held the Rothschilds' purse open to us! Our funds rose at once. Alas! Prejudice—the weapon of fools—soon destroyed all this, the work of many years! Loris Melikoff chased Sternberg away, to revenge himself on Ignatieff, who had been his own commander in Armenia. The sly Armenian upstart ruined our finances!

"And so the funds which would have been at our command for Siberian and Asian exploitation, are diverted into American and other foreign enterprises!

"But, Baron Sternberg has an enormous influence near the Czar!

"For, Major, the Imperial family often needs money, and 'gold has no religion.'"

"This is a strange alliance!" mused Major Wardlawe, as he drove down to the Moika. "The union, in interest, between Esmè Chilkoff and the Prime Minister of the Rothschilds!"

"Perhaps Sternberg and his masters have an eye on the enormous trade interests to be developed by the Siberian Railway.

"And they can play the game as adroitly as the Hebrews of the Alaska Fur Company did in their Russian concession. They must have a Russian figurehead, a name, to operate under! Ignatieff is too old to handle the scheme now. His son is but a boy in the Cadet School! And perhaps this Tcherkess Star, the inheritor of a valuable franchise, may be the one potent

name under which Sternberg and his friends will dominate the interior trade of China and Siberia! The money handlings will be immense, the profits huge. Strange wayward girl! Devoid of every feminine weakness, when womanly passion once wakes her heart, she will be a human meteor!

"And for what purpose does she hoodwink Gorlitz, the Ignatieffs, Chestakoff and all, even Sternberg, as to her secret inspection of these half-forgotten properties? Has that girlish mind the nerve to checkmate the Czar by arraying the Jewish money kings of the world against him?

"If they do not rule the world of ships and factories, of railways and mines, they are the true kings of the Bourse and the money exchanges!

"'On the Rialto' the word of a Sternberg is mightier than the fiat of a Romanoff! My Hebrew allies seem to have taken Shylock's description of Antonio's carelessly spread out ventures as their 'vade mecum!'

"Yes, there must be a reason for this seal of secrecy, that even Agar Chilkoff knows not his brave sister's plans! The daring girl would hold him free of all!"

Major Wardlawe had listened to Ignatieff's stories of the transcendently beautiful Caucasus.

"It has two hundred thousand square miles! Its six million people are a greater heritage than that of Frederick the Great!" mused Ignatieff on this pleasant afternoon, taking up his favorite discourse.' "Only the separatist policy would ever quell these people!" reflectively said the great statesman. "The great princes have been gloriously seduced into the Czar's service and all scattered. The lovely women of their line divided in marriage among the loyal courtiers of Russia's Czar and craftily located in the farthest limits of our sixty-six separate governments."

"Was it this policy which made of Agar Chilkoff, a mountain prince, a Russian naval officer?" laughingly said Wardlawe. Think of a Circassian Admiral!"

"I directed that!" answered Ignatieff with a resentful gleam of his dark Tartar eyes.

"For, he was the next available kingly aspirant after Schamyl's two sons. One of these was slain as our foeman in seventy-seven. He came too near winning back the Caucasus! The other we have smothered in honors! He is a Colonel of Guards and an Imperial Aide-de-Camp.

"But this Agar Chilkoff was of a wilder flight! And, strange to say, a superb sailor! He is kept at the antipodes!

"The Princess Esmè?" murmured Wardlawe. "She is the failing case of all formulas! Neither fear nor flattery, force, nor Imperial favor has blinded this young eaglet's eyes. Scorning even 'force majeure' in my own presence, she said to the late Czar: "I will promise nothing till I am free! You could not tame Ayesha's soul! I am her daughter!'

"It was the wise old Empress who counseled delay. 'Let her fancy that she rules her own fate, but keep her out of Circassia!" said that august Czarina.

"And," sighed Ignatieff, "Esmè will not yield! Her domains are open to her at any time with a Russian husband of her own selection, but, not the gigantic Alexander Third, not even the fashionable Dagmar dares voice the proposition of a 'husband selected by the Privy Council!'

"They all remember Esmè's intrepid threat: 'There is always the river or the deadly "sleeping potion" of my people! Let your tyranny pause at my threshold!'

"And, Wardlawe," said the Count, "half of her domestics are these untameable children of the mist! They would obey her and die with her on a splendid funeral pyre made of this bewildering palace prison! Alone against the world, Esmè has never laid her head on any woman's bosom, save that of my gentle wife.

"And wild girl as she is, she shames us in her devotion to her Allah! 'Leave to me the truth and courage of my race, my birthright!' she cried. 'Your courtiers cringe, your priests are all liars! You conquered the Lesghian prophet king Schamyl; I am the

last of the Tcherkess monarchs, for even my brother wears your gilded livery.

"'But, free was I born and free will I die!'

"All the romance of the old Byzantine Emperors, the proud Georgian kings, is centered in this superb rebel, whose gallant father found an earthly paradise in Ayesha's arms! Love alone conquered her mother. If anything ever subdues the living fortress of Esmè Chilkoff's heart, it will be an overmastering love, and I fear that some tragedy will result! For the wild winds of passion will tempestuously sway her stormy heart!

"Our Russian youth—the flower of our hand—are to her but the children of her hated jailers."

"Closer than a brother now!" murmured Esmè Chilkoff when two weeks later the lively Circassian gave to Major Wardlawe her secret instructions, not to be opened until he reached Nagasaki.

"Here are my letters for Baron Sternberg, who will come over to Frankfort to meet you!" said the resolute rebel.

"You are to tell him nothing! He will only register your signature and take twenty duplicates, that you may draw drafts against my funds with Sternberg, payable in any port of the Orient!

"Fear not that the 'Water Witch' and her supplies will need your care! Dimitri Gorlitz has been ordered to inspect all of this! He fancies that the boat is intended for the Governor-General of Eastern Siberia, at Habaroffka."

"But who will I deal with at Nagasaki, Japan?" said the mystified American.

"We have had Sternberg's nephew transferred there as Russian Consul from Amoy! He will bear instructions to blindly obey you! Do not mention this to the Baron. For the transition from Levy to Levassoff was gracefully effected to enable Isidor Levy, then Oriental partner, to marry a Polish Countess, who saved her estates, as Levy won his bride by coming into the Greek communion!

"Receiving the name of 'Alexei' as a baptismal

present, you will certainly find Alexei Levassoff a Russian à la mode.

"Such is Russia! A Jewish groom, a Polish bride (Both of them secret hypocrites); in two years Levassoff's purchased Bavarian baronial title will be officially recognized by the Czar! I admire the honesty which makes no official list of the Russian nobles, save the Imperial family, and those created Counts of the Empire under patent."

"Levy or Levassoff will be my firm friend then?" demanded Wardlawe.

"He will do your bidding, and, remember, Ahmed, never mention my name! All is made smooth for you! He will communicate by cable with me through Sternberg, and he will send me in the official mail anything you wish! Simply say, 'For Sternberg,' and I will receive it quicker than if it were addressed to the Czar.

"For gold is king, even in the Orient!"

"As in America," sadly remarked the Major. "But your secret agent! The one who is to take the boat and make the inspection?" gravely said the engineer. "How will I recognize him"

"That has kept me sleepless!" smilingly said Esmè, "while you have been paraded in the court circle as Madame Ignatieff's protégé! The whole project hangs on this vital selection!

"To make the trip to Ust-Streika, where the Amoor breaks through the Khingan Mountains, will be the work of all July, August, September, and October!

"My agent must be out of the Amoor by November first, and then on his way back to the P. and O. steamers to Alexandria!

"Thence by Russian boat to Odessa and train here, I should have his report by December first!

"I have secretly assembled a half dozen followers for this agent; four American engineers will be selected by Gorlitz, men who have been on the Amoor, for Gorlitz is the protector of Freeman Smith & Co., your one American Siberian house.

"All that is easy enough! These are only the pawns! But the man upon whom this quest must depend for success? Where can I find him?"

Wardlawe gazed at the glowing face of the fearless young beauty.

"He must speak Russian and know all our laws! He must be a man of rank! He must be brave, devoted, young, true and a man of every resource! I cannot trust to a Frenchman or German! An Englishman is out of the question!"

There was a silence while Esmè leaned her head upon her hand. "You, I would have chosen, but that you would be the victim perhaps of some fanatic's jealousy of your speaking English! I dare send no one from her out with you!

"And your visit would mean the delay of the Government projects; a dozen spies would follow you; your dear life would be forfeited perhaps!

"No! You would be too great a sacrifice! You are now beloved closer than a brother! And I need you in my future! Agar, too, will need you! You shall yet learn to love him, as you love me!"

"A sailor—some bold officer, a Finn or Swede!" suggested Wardlawe.

"They are always brutalized by the officials, and are also men below the social grade that I need! There is more here than the twenty thousand pounds at stake!" mused the Circassian girl.

"Cannot Baron Sternberg aid you?" asked Wardlawe.

"I do not wish a clerk or a factor, a banker or a tradesman! I must have a hero, a man who would die for me, a man who would keep the faith and die in silence!

"No commercial man could be trusted! The tempting bribes, the dangers, the fatigues, the arrival of the unexpected—any of these things would wreck me for life! I play for a stake dearer to me than the mountain realm, which is mine, though my feet may never tread its enchanting vales!"

"Could not your brother find some naval officer, some golden-hearted Russian—no court dangler, but a man?" sighed Wardlawe.

"Yes!" solemnly said Esmè, "but that I dare not pen a line of this project. It would insure my ruin!

"Its chance discovery would ruin Agar and work just the double forfeiture, which the Romanoffs, as a dynasty, would hail with glee!

"It would be, of course, the Privy Council which would despoil and sentence us—not Alexander Romanoff! Remember how they sent a half million of the fearless Adighè, out to the starvation of a Turkish exile when Schamyl fell.

The vast estates of these loyal Mohammedan Circassians were forfeited to the Government and quickly filled up with hardy Russian officers, who have married 'by order' our fairest maidens!

"As the Queen of the Adighè and the Tcherkesses I have helped these martyrs of liberty and faith, through Sternberg, for, strange to say, the Sultans have been as tolerant to the Jews as the brave old Polish kings were! A noble lesson to the Orthodox!

"So a half million exiled hearts regard me as the sole heir of Ayesha, the last Queen of the Tcherkesses, the mystic Adighè! My people are in Turkey, my realm is in Russia, and I only reign in loyal hearts, two thousand miles away! They believe my brother Agar to be dead, for in his splendid foreign career, he is hidden from us all. I see the deft touch of Ignatieff's master hand in that!

"I have always loved my brave father's memory!

"Though of the hated Russian blood, even as conqueror, he served Queen Ayesha on his bended knee till Love raised him to her heart!"

And now the soldier of the star flag was on his knees before the startled Esmè.

"Tell me, my child, my sister, my dear one!" cried Wardlawe. "For God's sake, you are engaged in no mad scheme of revolt, no treasonable plot!"

And then, Esmè Chilkoff fell sobbing into his arms.

"Before Allah, your God, I swear by my mother's grave that I do no evil, that good may come!

"It is the work of high Heaven! A duel of love, of loyalty, of justice, that I may live and die free! Ask me no more, my Ahmed! The soul of my dead brother Ahmed beats now in your noble heart! Trust me, keep me, or I shall die!"

"To the last drop of my heart's blood! To the end of time! You are dearer to me than life, and do I not prove it, Esmè," he whispered, "when I can call you sister?"

A rosy flush transfigured Esmè Chilkoff's face!

"I love you more than if the priests had joined our lives!" she cried, "for you are greater than self, and I will pay you a hundred fold! You are a part of my life, though I may not be yours! Holier than that mere craving of the earth worm!

"Listen! In our life beyond the stars your soul and mine shall flow together, for, forget not, death unclasps the arm of all earthly love! But I alone must find the needed man!"

When she had refound her calmness, she whispered as if in fear of her avowal: "There are loyal Russians! I know a few gallant hearts! And yet men who would press me against my will to give them my poor self, in return for a service which might bring them to the gallows if malevolence should prevail! I cannot lie! I will not trap men's souls! Ayesha's daughter cannot stoop so low!

"And yet, for all that, I must succeed! I will.

"One, one alone I could trust—Sacha Menchikoff!"

Wardlawe started in a sudden surprise.

"The duellist?"

"Yes!" sadly sighed Esmè, "I had him sent away to Tomsk to save his life or that of Allan Law. You may not know it! Natalie Ignatieff loves Allan Law as a brother! I think she knew his English mother in her girlish days. Menchikoff is a fiery noble, the last of a great house! He alone chivalrously refused to address me 'under an Imperial suggestion'! He could mate with Russia's proudest—up to the Imperial blood—and he has warned me of the pitfalls dug for me! But, he is young and cruel; the wine of life seethes in his veins! He would be the one man of the world to do my bidding to execute this quest! And I could have him recalled by a single telegram!

"But he has the pride of a hundred princes in his fiery veins!

"He saw Allan Law's favored intimacy when Count

Ignatieff desired to save the friend of his wife from being chased out of Russia!"

"The excitement is all over!" calmly said Wardlawe. "Colonel Menchikoff might return and be placated! Law is no longer here! The English blustering, the Penj Deh clamor subsides from day to day! London is busy with its new Ministry, its factious Irish, its last explosion of April twenty-third."

"True," said the Princess, "and Ignatieff tells me that the Salisbury Ministry will soon take seals and kiss hands in a month; in fact, on June twenty-fifth."

"That ratifies a peace until the 'inevitable' comes —say in another generation!"

"But I could not call Sacha Menchikoff to my side," softly said Esmè. "No man has pressed my lips in love! My heart is still an unprofaned altar! Menchikoff would go at my slightest nod!—'Loyal jusquà la mort!' But, Ahmed, my more than brother, when he came back—without a word of demand—could I look into his honest eyes? He serves the Princess, but he would crave the woman! He is too young, too fiery, too ardent! I could not keep him off! I could not reward him! I cannot live a lie! My heart is an altar, my body a temper! And yet he has sworn to kill any man to whom I give this poor hand in marriage!

"And when he had given me a year of his life, when he had faced the bitter Amoor blasts for me, and I knew he would succeed; when he saw the coldness of my eyes he would go back to his caserne and then quietly shoot himself!

"No! Sacha Menchikoff must live to find the woman whom he loves and the woman who loves him! It cannot be! It must not be! It shall not be! I will not be a living lie! I will not bankrupt his brave young life!"

"For," she whispered, "only the sacred isolation of my palace prison, only Paula Fadaieff's ceaseless guard has kept this prince of rovers away! He knows that I love the high pride which armed his honor against his heart! That he would not throw the Czarina's veiled command into the scale against a friendless girl!

No, him will I spare! For his own sake, for the sake of womanhood!"

"And I must go then on a blind trail! Knowing nothing of your secret champion!"

"Listen!" cried Esmè, springing up like a lioness guarding her young!

"Here is my own signet ring! It is my mother's, the seal of the divine Ayesha! It was the talisman between our dead parents! Its motto in our Tcherkess tongue is touching! You see the graven stars! It reads: 'As long as the stars shine in heaven, I will love you!'

"I have the duplicate which was made for my gallant father!

"Agar left it on his last voyage as a thing too sacred to lose!

"I will send the other ring to you by the man whom I choose! He will have all his orders! He will only say to you, 'In Agar's name!' and give you a sealed letter from me, in which I will say to you, in my own handwriting, 'Ecce homo!'

"The rest of the letter will be filled with the chatter of the court, the news of our circle perhaps," she smilingly said, "even messages from the warm hearts you leave behind you here!"

Wardlawe gazed into the softened eyes of the beautiful enigma.

"Esmè!" he softly said, "if any woman on God's footstool ever heard me plead again in love it would be you, and, you know it!

"And when I have put that dream by for you, at your own bidding, am I not your slave? Never speak of these bright-eyed banditti of Petersburg! They have only pleased themselves in pleasing me! It is the pleasure of the chase with them—not the game!"

The Princess sat with her eyes covered with her trembling hands! Some spell seemed to be upon her! Beneath her silken armor, her undaunted heart beat tumultuously, and her bosom rose and fell in some strange new emotion!

"Walter!" she said, grasping his hands, her eyes filled with a strange yearning sweetness, "it is better

as it is! That you love me as you do, that you do not crave me like Sacha Menchikoff! For do you not see, you alone reap what is denied to him! Even Agar cannot share with you this love which is its own 'exceeding great reward!' I find all the peace and courage of my stormy girlhood in your loyal heart!

"And if you did love me like these others you might know regret some day! For I might be tempted to show you all the weaknesses of my nature!

"But you will always love me beyond measure, for I shall make you! You will never escape me!"

With a light foot she passed him, returning soon in a strange calmness. "I will talk to the stars to-night! There is an old Mollah here, one who knows my mother's old charms! I will find out the man!

"And Sacha Menchikoff shall mate with some passionate Russian who will keep his heart always aflame in Love's torments! When the love of a life reaches my heart it will be a tide which will bear me away at the hour of fate! It will be Kismet!"

"You will succeed, Esmè!" cried Wardlawe. "There is victory in your own dear eyes! And you have nobly spared Menchikoff! You have a warrior's soul and the honor of a Bayard! Listen!

"In three days I go away secretly! I have all my instructions!

"Only Paul Kurtz, Admiral Chestakoff and Count Ignatieff will know! I am telegraphed home! The boat will be shipped on June eighth! I will be at Nagasaki on July first!

"So send all letters after me to this young prince of Judah and Mammon, the Russianized Levy with the Polish countess wife made over into a good Muscovite!"

"I am glad that the serpentine Ilka Plessky is on her estate at Skierniwice," mischievously said Esmè, "for she gave up none of her Circe-like ways, 'en Polonaise,' when she carried the millionaire's heir and nephew to save her estates and avoid the fierce wooing of an old Russian General! She will await Levassoff's promotion to be Minister to Portugal!

"Even stoic as you are, I would not care to trust

you with Ilka! I remember her ways at the Catherine Institute, a very Delilah of the daughters of Sobieski!

"You will give me the last evening, alone, at my own house!" sadly said Esmè. "Leave the Ignatieffs to me; they are 'as wax in my hands!'"

And as Wardlawe kissed her hands, she said:

"I do this that you may not betray the over-measure of love in your heart! So, you will make your adieux to the Ignatieffs and Chestakoff at breakfast, and give that agreeable doyen of bachelors, Paul Kurtz, the day before! You belong to me on your last evening!"

"Have I not been a loyal man?" demanded Wardlawe. "We have outwitted the whole of St. Petersburg!"

"True!" sighed Esmè, "but the ordeal by fire is to come! I know that Allah will send help! To-night I spend in commune with Ayesha's soul! She will guard her orphaned child from yonder bright stars!"

It was not without secret misgivings as to his own self command that Walter Wardlawe entered for the last time the silent palace where no pictured face gazed from the walls.

He had baffled the keen-eyed gossips of the gayest court in the world, and even the bluff Grand Duke Michael had no meaning jest to enliven his hearty farewell! The gentle patronage of the Countess Natalie Ignatieff had led the American on beyond the Scylla of dissipation and the Charybdis of intrigue!

Perfectly calm in the possession of not a single document, the American complacently reflected upon his passage secured at Cherbourg and the welcome awaiting him in the proud banking city where Meyer Anselin Rothschild once lived in the Judengasse.

Surgeon Pauloff's claiming a return visit, the laughing adieu of a score of charming women had cheered him, and neither midnight robber, farcical arrest, nor railway collisions now floated before his mind.

He was leaving Russia with the certainty of an assured fortune awaiting him! And yet his friends had prudently veiled the attempt on his life!

"You will have an officer with you from the moment

you reach Nagasaki, one who speaks English, French and German.

"And the Czar has personally directed a telegram to be sent to Admiral Lemacheffsky, at Vladivostock, as to your full powers in the matter of the Saghalien works! You will be treated as one of the Imperial family, 'a guest of the Czar.'

"I envy you," said the old soldier-diplomat, "for my youth was spent in China! Siberia and the Caucasus knew my young manhood. My time of surging manhood, my only happy days!"

Wardlawe was happy in that Paul Kurtz was going with him as far as Berlin as "camarade de voyage," for the factotum of the American Legation had borne the burden of these three months of the Penj Deh excitement.

"Komaroff gets a Lieutenant-Generalcy, a diamond sword, and a hundred thousand golden roubles! For six years of service here I get the privilege of paying my way to Carlsbad and back, to get the Neva malaria out of my bones at my own expense! The gratitude of republics! So, meet me at the train. 'Luigi' will attend to all!"

Wardlawe appreciated the art-loving Secretary's kindly self-effacement, and now, in withdrawing himself from the witching whirl of St. Petersburg, he felt only the fear of betraying to Esmè Chilkoff the surging passions of his heart!

"I must learn to live without her!" he gravely said.

"First to serve her, then to learn again the lesson of life! Duty, self-denial, even, renunciation!"

He started back in astonishment on his entrance, to find the great palace within its doubly shrouded windows lit up as for a royal festival, with Oriental lanterns.

Troops of Asiatic servants were ranged in the vast hall, where old Ali Roustan, in the chivalric armor of a Circassian warrior, conducted him to a set of state apartments.

And there, by signs and entreaty, the old henchman forced Wardlawe, in loving kindness, to don an Asiatic dress of surpassing richness.

"Agar!" he muttered, as he pointed to the princely garb.

"It is some fanciful masquerade!" murmured Wardlawe, "and I am for this one of the thousand and one nights, to be really Ahmed!" he concluded as he read the little note 'For my sake!'

He recognized Esmè's strange chirography.

As he was led down the banquet hall, there burst forth strains of wild martial music, and his heart stood still as Esmè Chilkoff then appeared, a majestic beauty, clad in robes which rivaled a coronation dress of the Czarina.

There was a coronet of diamonds and priceless turquoises upon her head as she swept forward to meet him.

"To-night, I wear for you," she fondly said, "the robes of Ayesha, the Queen of the Adighè—a dead queen, a lost kingdom, an exiled or a conquered race, divided even in their fall!"

The amazing richness of the banquet, the splendors of this never-forgotten night bereft the secret envoy of his self-control.

"I am no longer a wanderer of the West! I am Ahmed, for you, this night!" he vowed, as he sat on the divan at her side, where they were served in the royal state of her birthright.

"Fail me not, my brother!" whispered Esmè in her thrilling voice, "and you shall be adopted into our mystic tribe! One countersign will make you the heart brother of four millions! For, whom I love they will cherish and die for!"

It was when the star dials pointed to morn that the last words had been spoken.

"The Baroness!" queried Wardlawe. "I reign for one night, freed from all spies, even my loving jailer," whispered Esmè.

"I have talked with Ayesha! The stars have been kind to me!" said Esmè when the parting moment came. "Now you know all but the unraveled web of the future! I ask no pledges of my brother! For you now wear my signet ring! Remember, Levassoff, by dispatches or cable, will have all my orders! But I

alone, Ahmed, am to be the judge of good and evil! The fierce play of events may raise storms around me! Admiral Lemacheffsky, at Vladivostock, and Baron Knorp, who goes to Habaroffka, are the Czar's viceroys!

"It is as the Queen of the Adighè, your sister, that I order you to hold your hand off there and let me work my will!

"For, what is written by Fate will be done, and if we meet again you shall know all; and Agar, free to act, will hail you as brother! Let nothing dismay you! I have the alliance of the Kings of Gold against the ruler of the Icy World!

"And my dead mother, from the stars, will fight my battle! I shall know all! Remember, even in life and death I will be at your side, and I must work out my will! For you alone to-night I am the Queen of the Tcherkesses, a power above the Czar! These royal robes will never be worn again till Agar sits beside us, in the bright days to come!

"Now to Sternberg, to New York, San Francisco, Yokohama, Nagasaki, and Vladivostock. Even at Dui you can cable to Sternberg, through Levassoff. They will arrange all! Write me never a line!"

They stood alone in the vast banquet hall.

Suddenly Esmè Chilkoff opened her arms, and as the messenger of her strange quest clasped her to his breast, she kissed him with lips of fire!

"Go, go! Ahmed!" she cried, with her arms clinging to his neck in a frenzied tenderness. "I have sealed your faith with the first kisses of my lips! See how I trust you! Go, for I may remember that I am not only the daughter of warriors, but a woman—only a woman, Ahmed! Here is my last token! No man must ever gaze upon that pictured face!"

She pressed a golden case into his hand, and swiftly ran to the stair.

Standing there, a vision of delight, she ran back and kissed him once again. "Be brave, true, bold, fortunate, and come back to me! For you know not what you do! But Time will open to you this lonely heart! You are my brother—to eternity!"

When the grizzled old warrior touched his arm, the American went out as one drunken with the honey wine of the Circassian hills!

In silence he rearrayed himself, and he started as Ahmed hung around his shoulders a blue cloak lined with the priceless mandarin fur. Its collar was of the Imperial black sables.

Then, kneeling, the old warrior kissed the American's hand.

Unclasping his dagger, he handed the richly chased blade to his adopted chief.

"Schamyl!" he said, as he kissed the blade thrice and presented it to the new lord of the misty hills, a brother of the royal house of Ayesha!

When the gray dawn came, Major Wardlawe slowly rose and called back the enhancing vision of the night.

"Did I dream?" he sighed. For these were words of vast import burned into his brain, and he heard again a voice which softly murmured: "Swear secrecy until I release you; swear upon my mother's ring!"

Only the royal cloak, and the golden miniature case remained to prove the truth of his entry into a Circassian paradise, the court of a phantom queen, the star of the Tcherkess dynasty!

Opening the clasped miniature, Wardlawe covered the face of Esmè Chilkoff with burning kisses.

For there she was pictured as he had seen her at the Opera, shining down even the Imperial Dagmar. The little legend in diamond letters, "Esmè to Ahmed," was traced around a slender film of the silken hair, which seemed to be doubly a part of her very being now!

He paced his room until Luigi opened the door. "I am to attend you to the station! The Secretary will join you there."

Mere pride of honor kept Wardlawe from seeking again the silent palace, but, with haggard eyes, he drove sullenly to the great station.

There, his face lighted up when a score of their friends surrounded the unruffled Kurtz and the de-

parting American with the loving good-by and the flowing champagne of the light-hearted Russians.

Some secret anxiety gnawed at Wardlawe's heart until an official, bowing low, led the Major into an official state reception room.

And there, Nicholas Ignatieff and Admiral Chestakoff made their hearty adieus.

But the man who had charged at Five Forks without flinching, shivered when the old Count said: "The ladies are in that parlor!"

With moistened eyes, Wardlawe pressed Natalie Ignatieff's hands as she strode out into the salon.

And then, dropping her veil, Esmè Chilkoff turned the sunlight of her beauty again upon him. "I can bear it in hope, Walter!" she whispered, "though the parting hour is here! You have my picture with you, the only one ever painted of a daughter of the mist! And daily you will hear from me till on the sea!

"And now, God guard and guide and lead you!" She kissed his brow solemnly and stood with her hands trembling under his kisses as he obeyed the appeal of her eyes.

And the train had passed Gatschina before Wardlawe again found his voice. "You are not the only man who has gazed back with an infinite longing at the golden dome of St. Isaac's Church!" solemnly said Kurtz.

"There is a magic in Russian womanhood which disarms all reason!"

The American soldier bowed his head in silence, for he saw again that pale, proud face with the appealing tender eyes, the Queen of a night, the star of the unconquered Tcherkesses!

That night, alone in her room, Esmè Chilkoff listened to the breathing of the stern old Ali Roustan, who lay on the floor without, a hardy guardian of the last jewel of the Caucasus!

She drew from her bosom a letter, the composition of which had cost its writer a week of torment! "Major Wardlawe can aid him, at the last, if peril should befall him! Can I lay this burden upon him, this bright young life?

"For the sake of our royal house, for my heart's promptings! For Ayesha's holy line! There are no stars to guide me to-night!"

She read again the impassioned words which brought once again the rose flush upon her face and neck and bosom! "He alone could be successful if he dares to face death and shame for me! He tempts it, and he will come at my bidding! One more night for Allah's guidance! And, if Ayesha speaks, her will shall lead me!

"For none know—not Natalie, not even the golden-hearted Ahmed—my bold-hearted American brother! How can they know when he himself does not know!"

In a sweet confusion she sought the shelter of darkness, and sleep came to her, and then the rule of mystic dreams! Her secret agent was far beyond Wilna before the troubled Princess found the sleep she courted.

Before Walter Wardlawe had sailed toward the setting sun, before the Baron Sternberg had handed him the last of Esmè's daily telegrams, there was a sunburned stranger waiting in the telegraph rooms at the Kharkov station, a mighty hunter, who had wandered back from the burning sands of Khiva!

A pallor as of death overcame the desert tan as the tall North Country man read the fateful words of the telegram, "In my hour of need, I bid you to come!"

Ayesha had spoken to her fearless child.

"Now, by God's grace, this is the one maid of all the world for me!" mused Allan Law. "Perhaps in some strange deed of self-denial I may wash out the one stain of my life, the dishonor of plotting to rob Wardlawe for England's sake. And yet, I saved his life!" First-class for St. Petersburg!" he said, throwing down a hundred rouble note.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FASTEST BOAT EVER BUILT!

Before Wardlawe and Paul Kurtz parted at Berlin, the American soldier had regained his customary composure.

Worn and weakened by the mental fencing of a Saint Petersburg life, the Secretary of Legation was content to see the stolid Prussians replace the simple Russian soldiery.

"Only a change of uniforms," placidly said Kurtz, "and yet, it is a pleasure to shift one's harness a little, and not always fight on the defensive."

"You, Wardlawe, go back to the active 'dollar hunting' of America; I will refresh myself and again take up my amused watch of the long duel of the Lion and the Bear."

"You have become a bit unsettled by the Neva, my friend," said Kurtz, with a curious smile, "and you will soon drift back to Russia again."

"Why do you not return to America yourself?" said Wardlawe.

"Fate is stronger than I am," quietly answered the diplomat. "I have learned ways of my own in fifteen years over here. I live in my surroundings, glad to watch the game of Life as it is played out by others.

"My modest means allow me an independence here, and, my position gives me its only reward, an entrée! I would be a mere helot in your plutocratic newer rule, at home! And here—I am content! Though the faces, the stakes vary, the same old game of Hearts and Clubs goes on!

"Look at Russia and England! The Crimea, the Franco-German war, the Plevna campaign, the Egypt muddle, now this untoward Penj Deh clash, show the same old deadly game! England 'bluffing' loudly; Russia warily waiting to take England at her weakest, and then deal a staggering blow!

"In the meantime the sly Muscovites are absorbing Asia, breaking down China's walls, enveloping Corea,

and, also, lacing Asia to Moscow, by steel railway fetters! We may never meet again, Wardlawe!"

"Remember what I tell you! In twenty-five years, England will sink forever below the horizon as a first-class military power unless she, too, adopts the 'universal service'!

"England must organize her army soon on modern lines, and develop her whole force, to win as formerly!

"Her navy? Well, it can easily ravage any land, except Russia!

"On the whole, the Russian policy is bold, sleepless, faultless, and, it will win!

"If England holds to the Turkish guarantee of Constantinople, and clings to India; in the future, she will lose one or both, at Russia's will."

Only in a last farewell did Paul Kurtz name Esmè Chilkoff.

"Singular protégée of the gentle Countess Ignatieff. The Circassian star is truly 'une femme incomprise."

"Radiant, distant, unapproachable—a creature of fire and flame! A charming feminine mystery, an unread human document! A fearless rebel, yet no conspirator. And to-day, the most charming woman in Russia, for, 'elle se cache'!

"There is a hero's heart within that ivory bosom!"

Walking the decks of the "Champagne," as the great French liner swung along past England's white cliffs, Wardlawe sportively kissed his hand to "la perfide Albion!"

"A pretty season, this 'eighty-five!' Gordon's slaughter, the cholera, earthquakes, the frantic Irish, the appalling dynamite fiends, the Egyptian muddle, anarchism in Paris, the Pall Mall Gazette disclosures, and the inglorious fall of Gladstone's cowardly ministry!"

"Truly, a time of storm and stress! And so, under the black cloud of the Lumsden and Komaroff battle of denials, I leave my strange meddlers.

"Berry of the Artillery, his thieving valet Sam Norris, the adroit Allan Law, and, the stupid London Police!

"Some day I will read all this riddle! Everett Marsden was madly rash to entrust me with such a hidden embassy! He should certainly have sent two agents! But, I have taken a long step upward to a permanent fortune! 'Palmam qui meruit ferat!'"

But, one ugly feeling lingered in Wardlaw's mind.

"The next man who creeps on me—dies! I will be 'loaded for bear,' as the frontiersmen say! Down with all sneaking foes!"

In the three days spent with the impassive Baron Sternberg, in the princely old commercial town of Frankfort, Wardlawe admired the poise of the great financier's mind.

He had been entertained with an unceasing luxury, and no word remained to be spoken, when Sternberg waved his adieu at Cherbourg. Not a syllable as to Esmè Chilkoff's altered purposes had escaped the banker's lips. He only spoke of the absent Tcherkess Queen, with a reverential deference in monosyllables.

But a last disclosure awaited Wardlawe, when the Baron himself inspected the American's cabins and found that the cigars, rare wines, and comforts of the voyage were all duly in place.

"I have adjured you to travel with no letters, papers, or vulnerable secrets, Major," said the millionaire. "My heart goes out with you on this voyage! You are one of two agents, differently impelled, who work the will of the noblest woman on earth! Never name her to others!"

"Now to us," and he indicated all the money kings, by a wave of his bediamonded hand, "there is but one weapon—the cheque book!

"You—facing all the risks of the Orient, and its veiled intrigues, need to be armed by day and night! You must make no traveling acquaintances.

"I have given you a wedge lock here for your cabin. Keep the windows locked and the slide drawn at night. Take no companion in any closed room, and use a drawing-room compartment in crossing America.

"Levassoff will assign you secret guards at Nagasaki."

"Why all this counsel?" vaguely demanded

Wardlawe. "I am an old soldier, the match yet for any one man!"

"Yes, but all's fair in Love and War!" significantly said the great Hebrew. "Even 'She' would not tell you! Marsden was mad to entrust such a commission to you blindly. You remember the German Professor and your railway accident!"

"Poor fellow!" sighed the Major. "He was killed!"

"He was only dragged from your helpless body by the prompt energy of Standiford!" Setrnberg solemnly said.

"An accidental jar of the train in stopping, caused him to accidentally wound you!

"After drugging you, the wretch was busily cutting the buckskin vest from your body! He had followed you on from Berlin, and why he did not stab you and throw your body from the window in the long, lonely stretch between the frontier and Dünaberg, we never will know!"

"How do you know this? The tale is incredible!" cried the excited American.

"Ah! My friend! Pauloff and the two great men quieted you with a story of an accident! Now, I have spent thirty thousand roubles to find this brute. The disappearance of your rich fur pelisse was a clue:

"The leading Jewish Rabbi at Dünaberg traced that valuable article. And the Russian police were both wise and silent!"

"My money loosened the tongue of the Polish Israelite wineshop keeper, a sly woman, who sold the fleeing wretch a dead man's passport, and effectually disguised him! It was as a French cook that the assassin escaped by Riga to Memel."

"There we lost all traces! So you were followed from Paris, for the would-be assassin was fluent, nay Parisian in his French, and he had money ad libitum.

"In Memel he refuged himself in the Quarter Brèda! His disguise was perfect, for he was a 'boulevardier' par excellence, dark and stocky, probably a Parisian thug! Captain Scheremietchieff then visited Memel with the Jewish woman, Rebecca Ein-

stein, who had the Rabbi's parchment contract of protection from the Russian authorities. Now, who did you meet in Paris? Can you not recall?"

"Not a soul, but Allan Law," growled Wardlawe, a sullen frown settling on his face.

"Perhaps Colonel Berry was only a secret service spy, and this Law, his tool. He presented me to him?"

"Law?" echoed Sternberg, in amazement. "Impossible that he should be your murderous enemy!"

"He is a member of the Royal Yacht Club. There is but one life now between him and a leading peerage! He is a man of a singular reticence. And besides, his fortune is large. I happen to know that his account at Coutt's is an enormous one, for any commoner."

"There is some old grievance between a great Scottish and English house. No! He is far above any personal treachery! And, he, too, has suffered a great deal from his romantic Russian nature."

"Be it as it may, I am glad that he has been drifted away from me forever!"

"Though he went away to Turkestan, as a mighty shekarry, he may, by and by, show up in Siberia. Fools and Englishmen go everywhere! No dangers fright them and no labors tire!" said Wardlawe, laughing.

"I have warned you," said the Baron. "Law will not again turn up. As an Englishman, his life would be instantly forfeited in Siberia, now. The war fury is on all those distant Tartars!"

As the steamer swung away, Wardlawe said grimly: "The next man who attacks me, dies! I will have an old Sergeant of mine go out to Siberia with me. He joins me at New York. I have already written for him to be ready."

"It was the British Embassy at Paris which dogged you!" finally said the Baron Sternberg.

"A gallant fellow," cried the old millionaire, as he drove away after Wardlawe had faded from sight!

"And, the end is not yet! But, he is both forewarned and forearmed."

While the merry promenaders on the "Champagne" were watching Wardlawe's solitary figure, the lonely soldier was lost in a day dream.

Only the magnificent ruby ring and the talismanic signet, concealed in a bag around his neck, with Esmè's picture, remained to prove that the Queen of the Adighè was not a mere dream phantom of delight.

"I am glad that I cabled to Crampton!" mused Wardlawe. "It seems that I can afford to be liberal now with funds. For, Everett Marsden, like all of his kind, expresses his feelings in concrete dollars and cents.

"I will take his money, for I may drift away from routine work, yet, and, try to forget, the past and, the present," he sighed, "in world wandering."

"And now, as far as New York I will play the recluse. If I cannot outwit the English secret service, I am a dull ass, indeed!"

While he mused upon the misty future, Allan Law sat in the music room of the splendid house of Count Ignatieff, gazing in wonder at the face of the woman who had haunted his dreams on the Khiran desert.

He was astonished at his reception, for a cold sternness filled the eyes of the bewitching Circassian.

One glance at Madame Ignatieff, discreetly posted within visual range, froze the rash words trembling on Law's lips.

"You sent for me, Princess!" earnestly said Law.

"Yes, my friend!" calmly answered Esmè. "To save your life! When you sent Ali Roustan home and crossed the Caspian to Khiva as an Englishman, you forfeited your life. Tell me, have you as yet seen any one here?"

"Not a soul," answered Law, chilled and dismayed.

"You then must not show yourself," gravely said Esmè. "Your mad hunting trip to Khiva has been already reported here!"

"Besides, your friends are now all scattered. Standiford has gone home to America, Major Wardlawe is now half way to San Francisco, Secretary Kurtz is on a long leave.

"If you approach the English Embassy, the Minister of the Interior will believe that you have spied upon our exposed flank."

"What shall I do?" quickly said Law.

"Leave here to-morrow night, at latest," soberly replied Esmè.

"You were my guest at Dariel. Each day I had a private report, and the Government held me responsible for you. When you disguised yourself as a Circassian, and went on to Khiva, you forgot to stain your brow, and so," she laughingly cried, "you were a self-detecting masquerader. But, for my secret orders, and the guards who followed you, you would have been assassinated. Now, the war cloud has blown over, for the moment. Are you free to leave here?"

"I would go to the ends of the world for you, Princess!" eagerly cried Law.

"Do not be rash! I may now try you!" said Esmè, with a mysterious smile.

"Can you play the Russian for six months? Can you forget the Englishman?"

"Try me!" vowed Allan Law.

"Even if your life depended upon it?" persisted Esmè, with no softness in her eyes.

"I am a Russian—at heart, now!" laughed Law. "I will wager my life on it!"

"Are you so sure? We will see!" gravely said the Circassian. "Do you know anything of steamboats?" continued Esmè.

"I qualified as master and chief engineer of my steamer, the 'Dreadnaught,' in which, three years ago, I went to Corea and Khamschatka on a hunting trip, and I took her out alone and home by the Suez Canal. I am a member of the Royal Yacht Club! I sailed the 'Undine,' my old sailing yacht, around Japan, five years ago; so I am both a steam and sail expert, at your service."

The Princess Chilkoff fixed her burning eyes upon the young man.

"On one condition only," she said, "will I test your knight errantry! That is, perfect and loyal obedience, a silence to the death, and my name is to be held inviolate! I am dead to you till we meet again!"

"I swear it!" cried Allan Law.

"Then," brightly said Esmè, "Ali Roustan will be here in an hour with a closed carriage. He will fit

you out here as a Russian, from the cigarette case to the revolver belt! All your luggage, every personal article he will remove and store at my home!"

Her face was crimson now. "I am to furnish you with passport, funds and directions! To-night you take the Odessa train, get a steamer there; at Alexandria you can catch the next P. and O. boat, and you are to receive all your orders at Nagasaki from Baron Alexei Levassoff, the Russian Consul-General, who will present to you my chief agent.

"Levassoff will give to you my orders, wishes and your duties will then be made clear! I will dine here to-night! Ali Roustan will bring you back, and I will say farewell below in the robing room! Your money, passport and tickets will be all ready! Ali Roustan will go down third class to Odessa and watch over you.

"But you are not to mention my name till we meet again! This is the obligation of honor!"

"My life upon it!" cried Law, with his eyes fixed upon the glowing face.

"And, how will I know your agent at Nagasaki?" demanded the new Russian.

"He will have the duplicate of this ring and will say to you, 'In Agar's name!'

And, Levassoff will only bring the right man to you!

"But you must use no English word—only French or Russian, and never speak of me till we meet!

"I am to return here?" said Law.

"I will find you!" said the Princess Esmè. "I shall know where you are each day!"

Allan Law raised the hand of the trembling woman. "My life is yours!" he said, gravely.

Half an hour later the Princess Esmè raised her tear-stained face and muttered, "It is the only way! For if he is brave, he may be also generous!"

Madame Ignatieff was thoroughly deceived by Esmè Chilkoff's natural desire to hurry Allan Law away from St. Petersburg. "This wild girl loves Sacha Menchikoff, after all!" she mused; "but Allan Law's hunter's beard becomes him well! It is wise for him

to leave Russia till the Anglophobes are moderated in their fury!"

Allan Law saw but the stately form of the Circassian Princess in the dusky apartment when she handed him his passport as "Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff, merchant of the first class," of Kharkov, Russia."

"Here are the tickets and there is a twenty thousand francs in French notes in the note case! Levassoff will supply all the money you need in his own name! And you will learn the rest there!

"Here is the ring! Remember, 'In Agar's name!' And I am to be blotted out of your mind till we meet again! Go now, in God's name!"

Allan Law knelt and kissed the icy hand of the beautiful woman, who clasped the ring around his neck with a golden chain.

"Esmè!" he cried, as he saw her suddenly totter, but Ali Roustan sternly dragged him to the door.

There was a whirr of carriage wheels, and with all the full speed of the troika the traveler just reached the first class compartment, where a Russian valet awaited him as the bell clanged.

With a few whispered words and a menacing gesture of caution, Ali Roustan darted into the third-class car as the train glided out.

"The Barin will not be disturbed!" said the valet. "This carriage goes to Odessa, and all the meals will be served here!" He extended a sheaf of the Petersburg Russian journals and then dutifully lit his master's cigarette. "In mufti!" mused "Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff" as he read his Russian description on the book passport.

It was already visad for Japan and Siberia.

Sinking back in the cushions, he mused over his quaint frontier outfit, and his new social birth.

"There'll be a bit of good shooting out there, I fancy!" he concluded, as he recalled Ali Roustan's extensive provisions. "I am now a sort of lay brother of 'Alice in Wonderland!'"

"But, I must mind my eye and be the Russian merchant, to the life!"

And, then, he saw far beyond the misty, unknown path the eyes of Esmè Chilkoff calling him back!

At dinner Count Nicholas Ignatieff roused himself to whisper to the Princess Chilkoff: "You strange child! I prevailed on Minister Tolstoi to send the papers about Allan Law back to Astrakan for a detailed report of his illegal trip to Khiva! Are you satisfied?"

Esmè murmured: "Thanks, Monseigneur! He will be in England before they reach Astrakan! He left to-night!"

And so Allan Law dropped out from the memory of the little coterie which had watched anxiously for a tragedy on the return of Sacha Menchikoff!

Ten days later Roustan silently reappeared, bringing the roses back to the cheeks of his anxious mistress, as he handed her a letter—which she fled away to read—a letter bedewed with happy tears.

The baffled passengers on the "Champagne" were astonished at the freemasonry which passed Major Walter Wardlawe across all the disgusting network of the customs on arrival at New York, and the celerity with which the Major, his one trunk and two portmanteaus disappeared.

Sergeant William Crampton, late of the "Iron Brigade—Sixth Army Corps," was a robust bronzed veteran, with a beautifully disfiguring sabre slash pointing into his sweeping soldierly black mustache.

"All right, Major!" he cried, "I have the compartment secured, clear through to San Francisco! Breakfast ordered at the Grand Union, and a dozen of your old officers will be there to shake your hand! I have brought telegraph blanks, stamped envelopes and a writing pad! I fancy that I have all we will need for the voyage."

Four hours later, master and man were gazing at the witching banks of the Hudson, as the train flew past West Point.

"Sergeant Bill" was now aware of his special functions, and, lynx-eyed, with his "old army six" ready, the rugged veteran guarded his master by day

and night until they were driven into the courtyard of the Palace Hotel at San Francisco.

"Just two days to stay here, Sergeant," remarked the Major as they entered the long-deserted rooms.

"The 'Tokio' sails on Wednesday at ten! So get all you need for a six-months' rough frontier trip! I have my entire outfit! Go down and get the tickets and all that! Jones will conduct you! Special return tickets to Nagasaki, good for six months! Two first class! And you are to be in my cabin—*no one else!* Spare no expense!"

Left alone, the returned soldier found the prediction of "Handsome Jones" to be verified.

"All ship-shape and sailor fashion," he mused, as he wandered among his own familiar surroundings.

Before evening, he had arranged his private interviews with Sterling Mott and Everett Marsden, leaving the adroit Dimitri Gorlitz to find his own way in, as before.

Two hours given to the master of the shipbuilding division of the National Works opened the eyes of the traveler as to the "Water Witch."

"Mr. Mott has copies of all these plans in his private safe, Major!" cried the admiring scientist. "She certainly is the fastest boat ever built, and we have sent the best crew with her that ever left San Francisco!

"For years we have tried to get at Yarrow and Thornycroft's secrets! They are all embodied in this craft—a resultant of the double plans sent!"

Leaning back with his eyes fondly fixed on his dead wife's picture, Major Wardlawe learned of the engines of irresistible power, the boilers arranged for wood or coal, the bulkheads for liquid fuel to run five hundred miles, the cased propellers, the smoke-consuming, forced draught devices, and the bilge keels suited for either river or sea navigation.

"She is a wonder of the hour, this peerless flyer! She can make twenty-five miles against a five-knot current, or thirty with it. And stores, provisions, repair, armament—the whole thing was executed 'litera et scripta!'"

"I will let you know how she performs, Evans!" said the astounded Major, dismissing his friends with a thoughtful present.

"So this madcap girl is also an adroit naval constructor," mused Wardlawe. "I must shield her, at all hazards!"

He little dreamed of the price that Baron Sternberg had paid for the steamer's plans!

Major Wardlawe was prepared for the heartfelt welcome of those two American princes of finance, Sterling Mott and Everett Marsden, who came together to arrange for their last conferences, but he was not prepared for their requests that he should remain 'perdu' in his rooms at the Palace Hotel until the "City of Tokio" sailed.

"You can give each of us an evening!" said Mott, "but, we must keep the press busybodies and interlopers away until you sail!"

"Marsden will tell you that he has had several suspicious inquiries as to your return. I have had them also, and so, we have had the hotel secretly watched. The 'Count Smith' even has been outwitted.

"Men, women and children, notes, letters, telegrams have been used! These last come in various forms, none handled by mail! And Captain Lees will have a half dozen 'plain clothes' fellows watch the 'Tokio's' decks. What can oll this mean?"

Wardlawe's brow darkened. "I have a guard now, a brave one, and we are both 'cocked and primed,' as the army men say. But, I'll obey you! It is only some of your disgruntled competitors. But once at sea, God help any one who bothers me!"

The "Tokio" had her steam up before the eager traveler received all of his principal's instructions.

He knew now of the valuable block of steamship stock which testified Everett Marsden's gratitude. And of the contingent interest set off by Sterling Mott, which, alone, would have made his old age a comfortable one.

To both the millionaires he said: "I will defer the whole story until my return, for I may catch these shy birds sleeping!"

It was with a full knowledge of the giant enterprises under his hands that Wardlawe parted with Sterling Mott, and an understanding of Everett Marsden's far-reaching plans, which embraced the kingdom of the open Arctic and the cream of the fur and ivory trade on the Alaskan and Siberian shores for fifty years.

"No wonder, gentlemen!" laughed Wardlawe, "that men are envious! These plans of yours contemplate almost a new Asia—the Russianization of China and Corea, and the downfall of England's commercial transcendancy in the Orient. We will defer the later consideration until after I have made your Dui coal works a success!"

"Remember," said the millionaires as they left him at his hotel, "we only let you depart secretly for your own good! We have both sent on every word to the cconsuls, bankers and diplomats to guard you and further you in every way."

"And," whispered Marsden, "the Amoor Navigation Company needs you for your whole life!"

Stealing quietly out of the hotel, having disguised his departure for a tour of six months, Wardlawe made his way to the Yokohama steamer, carefully guarded by Sergeant Crampton.

"Not a dozen men in San Francisco even know of my return from Europe!" mused Wardlawe, as he crowded his way up to the gang plank of the huge "City of Tokio."

Suddenly he swerved as a sharp pain darted through the nerve of his left arm. There were fifty people struggling at the gang plank.

With a quick turn of the head, Wardlawe saw a half familiar face in the knot of pushing roughs and was then bodily moved up the gang plank.

The head steward at once led the "star" passenger of the trip to his splendid deck stateroom.

But Crampton sprang to his master's side, crying: "A glass of brandy, quick!"

As he closed the door, Wardlawe opened his eyes.

"It's nothing!" he faintly murmured.

"Nothing?" was Crampton's answer. "Your left

coat sleeve is cut open from shoulder to cuff. Some devil has tried to knife you—you're only grazed! He meant to rip you wide open!"

"Who the devil am I playing hide-and-seek with? What hidden foe?" growled Wardlawe, as the brandy revived him. "I only felt a hot iron passing over my arm. And the jostling pushed me away from this hidden wretch!"

"It's death the very next time he tries it!" swore Bill Crampton, with a mighty oath.

And then the virile face of Dimitri Gorlitz appeared at the cabin window—bushy beard, glittering spectacles and all. The steamer was slowly swinging out from the wharf.

"I am going out to come back with the tug, Major," gaily said the Russian Consul-General, as Wardlawe hobbled to the door.

"So they have already been at it!" he gravely said, watching Crampton's rough surgery. "I came down," he whispered, "to give you some telegrams from Baron Sternberg and, to warn you.

"A dozen times lately, various rough fellows have tried to find out when your passports would be visad. And so I kept away from you! Let me have them here and I'll fix you out now. There, sir," said Gorlitz, "is a special 'podrovjna,' an official permission, and an endorsement, which makes you really 'the Emperor's guest' in all our Asiatic possessions! This order was cabled to me from St. Petersburg.

"Once at Nagasaki, Alexei Levassoff will watch over you! If any one fools with you there he will execute a speedy vengeance. But look out for yourself on the voyage!"

Bending over Wardlawe, Gorlitz whispered: "The enemies of the Amoor Navigation Company seem to have sworn your death! Watch and keep a lookout on this boat! There is foul play abroad, and the detective-captain is more alarmed than he has confessed even to Mott and Marsden."

Two hours later the "Tokio" was boring her way out over the stormy bar, after Gorlitz had opened

with a liberal hand the good-by champagne so beloved by the Russian.

"God bless you, old fellow!" he cheerily said. "All the Czar's men will die for you over there! Only, 'watch out!' as you Yankees say, in Japan! You know the enemy! You have served Russia and are marked for their vengeance!"

"Say nothing of this cowardly attack!" sternly said Wardlawe; "Sergeant Crampton or I will wing the bird before long! I feel it in my bones, and I do not wish either Mott or Marsden to be excited! I am ready for death when it comes, but this hidden fellow will go with me, if he attacks me again!"

Major Wardlawe and Crampton closely examined their cabin as they saw the tugboat drop astern.

"Now for defense!" gayly said the Sergeant. "I was down here yesterday and took some notes."

He produced a neat little assortment of bolts, locks and chains, and from his valise brought out a solid steel plate, well provided with screw holes.

"I think that we will now be impervious to any sudden dash!" said Crampton as he screwed the steel plate on the window slide.

A half an hour with bolts and chains transformed the stateroom into a place of security.

Half an hour later the Captain entered.

When the jolly sea-dog left, Wardlawe wondered at the thoughtfulness of his San Francisco friends. "I am directed to post a man at your door every moment of darkness from the Golden Gate to Yokohama, and similar orders are sent on for the trip to Nagasaki! So Major, rest content! My quartermaster will also watch every one on this boat."

"Thank God!" mused Wardlawe, as he closed his eyes that night. "I have never mentioned Esmè's name! Only let me live to aid her in her wild project, for her own sweet womanly sake! This queenly phantom of delight, the wild sister of my heart who wears an invisible crown!"

While he spoke, far away on the Red Sea, Allan Law, in sulky loneliness, paced the decks of the splendid P. and O liner "Lord Clive."

"Muzzled!" he murmured, as he offered a light with a Gallic bow to a smooth-faced English globe-trotting lad. "I hope I'll get to the wilderness soon, for the Princess Esmè has laid a heavy burden upon me. Her name—thank God—is forgotten until she bids me speak. But a dozen times I've been on the point of crying, 'By Jove! Hurry up with that Bass' Bitter!' instead of gutturally growling 'Pivor!' or falling into my French. However, I'll do the best I can!"

And so, three hundred miles a day, the good ship swept on through silent, sweltering seas, bearing a very determined young man, who thoughtfully, each night, kissed the signet which Esmè Chilkoff had drawn from her finger. "Who is the other fellow who carries one of these?" mused the new-born Russian.

A query which occurred often to Major Wardlawe on the Pacific, as he gazed on the face of the young Queen of the Adighè and strove to recall the splendors of that night of memories and of sighs!

But the Major's brow darkened when the Captain reported that one of his quartermasters had grappled and roughly handled, in the night, a fellow trying to enter the door of the Major's deck cabin, long after midnight. "There was a trail of blood leading to the second cabin gangway," growled the Captain, "but the fellow wriggled away with a surprising strength. Only your locks and bolts saved you, and your steel window slide!"

Then a murderous look stole into Sergeant Crampton's eyes. "I swear that I will have that fellow's scalp yet, or else jump overboard."

The lurking foe was near them by day and night, and yet no face in the six hundred on board gave any sign of the malice of the midnight murderer.

Before the "Tokio" swung into Yokohama Major Wardlawe had finished his survey of the whole struggle of the two rival nations whose "military honor" had been finally appeased after the Penj Deh collision.

Behind the Emperor and Queen, pushing the whole circle of glittering "nonentities" onward—like pawns

on the chessboard of Life—the American could see the crafty Money Kings of the world.

"It is the same old game!" mused the soldier—"Point d'argent, point des Suisses!"

"Russia and England have issued boastful manifestoes and thrown the 'responsibility' upon the fierce Komaroff and the blundering Sir Peter Lumsden, whose dispatches were so neatly robbed between India and Downing Street.

"But the Rothschilds, and these great American syndicate chiefs, Marsden and Sterling Mott, with the whole clique of Gold, will gather the 'golden fruit' of the jarring nations.

"And poor Esmè Chilkoff, her shadowy inheritance may go to enrich these 'daughters of the horse leech,' but will her secret happiness be assured? Be it as it may, all around her seem to be only as wax in her hands!"

Through stormy days and starlight nights, Wardlawe found no solution for the puzzle of the continued pursuit. "I have nothing to steal now!" he mused. Marsden's Amoor Navigation Company defeated England's plan to rush up the purchased Chilian fleet to Esquimalt! He has pouched his gains! I even have my share! And Mott—this great Dui peaceful engineering contract of his is surely a menace to no one!

"Surely no human being can suspect the secrets of Esmè Chilkoff!

"Law, I will never see again! Berry was clearly innocent of any desire to entrap me, for he has since offered me every official and club hospitality! Is it some local rival of my California friends who seeks my life only to delay them? Personal feuds, I have none!"

Sighing over his loneliness in life, Wardlawe prepared to descend at the Japanese foreign metropolis.

He was recalled to his daily cares by the arrival of a steam launch with the Russian Consul-General's secretary.

"Monsieur Kostrominoff begs you to be his guest! He has several cable despatches for you, and he will

arrange for your departure for Nagasaki to-morrow. I am not to lose you from sight!"

So it was that Wardlawe drove to the splendid house on Mississippi Bay, where the bearded official led the American into his own room. "I have engaged the best cabin on the 'Hiroshima Maru' for your escort and yourself! So, only place yourself in my hands! I have telegraphed my colleague Levassoff, and if you will write your answers to your dispatches I am to send them all! Franked, too! You must not leave my house here. You are its master!"

Wardlawe ran over the little sheaf of cablegrams quickly. "Marsden, Mott, Gorlitz, Captain Lees, Baron Sternberg—all these can wait!"

His eyes were glued on the little slip reading, "Heart and soul with you, Ahmed. Answer: Sternberg, Esmè, Frankfort."

The reports of his friends were soothing, but the cablegram of Captain Lees struck a note of alarm. "Suspicious man in steerage sailed with you! Be on your guard! Description impossible; old hand at disguise."

"Certainly Lees means well," mused Wardlawe, "but this fellow will be balked here!"

And so it seemed when, two hours before day, the Russian Consul-General himself put Wardlawe and the stern-eyed sergeant secretly on board the old American steamer "Golden Age," now "Japanned" into the "Hiroshima Maru."

"As you have the bridal chamber, your meals will be served there.

"Avoid the deck in darkness!" said the cheery Muscovite. "I had orders to guard you as my own life!"

And when the great paddle wheels of the last ocean side-wheeler swept them down the bay, Wardlawe muttered: "Stole away! Safe at last!" Even the luggage had been secretly transhipped.

"Once in Nagasaki my friend Levassoff will put you under secret guard!" was Kostrominoff's last word. "But 'look out!' as you Americans strangely say, when you should 'look in!'"

Witching shores of Niphon, fairy islands, storied temples, and grand old feudal strongholds glided by; glimmer of moonlight, sheen of starlight wrapped them in the matchless beauty of the Inland Sea, until they glided—four days later—past the raw-red forts of Nagasaki, where the Krupp "barkers" grin a stern defiance to all civilization, for your "Jap" is only a thinly veneered savage, the sham product of an age of crowning sham!

"Nothing more beautiful in the world!" sighed Wardlawe as he gazed at the delightful bay with its terraced shores, the villas shining out from the green-clad hills.

His eyes wandered over the foreign fleets, the quaint Buddhist and Shinto temples, the Russian settlement with its familiar blue and white flag, and the hundreds of clustering sampan boats!

British, American, French, German, Portuguese and American flags wooed the soft breeze of the exquisite July morning.

Waking from a day dream, the alert Major turned to Sergeant Crampton:

"Do you remember when I laid out a week for that Confederate sharpshooter who killed so many of our officers at Petersburg?" he growled. "I've been talking with the Captain. There's no white passenger in the second or third class! If you are followed, the fellow is disguised as a native. So here let me work 'on my own hook!' It's his last chance, as you will hurry away to Vladivostock and Saghalien Island! No fellow could get in there without a straight Russian passport!

"Just give me a free hand, and, for God's sake, always go armed! I have a presentiment that this is what we used to call 'Soldiers' last chance!"

Wardlawe nodded, and then, forget all about it, as he grasped the hands of Alexei Levassoff, who, with the crafty prudence of his Semitic race, drew Wardlawe back into his own cabin.

"Thank God!" cried the Russian Consul. "What a load is lifted from my heart! My men will remove

all your belongings and my launch waits! You have a dozen telegrams here to answer."

One hour later the two men were seated on the porch of the Consul's splendid hill villa.

Levassoff, a cheery, dark-eyed, well conditioned man of thirty-five, waved his hand in deprecation of Wardlawe's astonishment. "Of course, we are well served! Only the missionaries," he smiled, "live better than we do!

"But, it is an exile! I long for Skierniwice, for my heart is in Poland!"

"I can well believe it!" simply said Wardlawe when in the great cool salon, facing the inevitable portraits of the Czar and Czarina, the Baron proudly showed the magnificent picture of Ilka Plessky, his millionaire bride.

"I am soon to be promoted and join her, after I have worked Sternberg's will. Now, to business!"

Over the champagne and cracked ice the men chatted as Wardlawe recalled his crowning mission.

"Your expected visitor is already at Shanghai! I had a cable signal from him yesterday! He arrives in four days.

"In one week you go to Vladivostock direct on the 'Hiogo Maru,' whose whole cabins have been reserved for you by Admiral Lemacheffsky! And the captain is a true Scotsman!

"Now, hurry with your own dispatches! Call on me for any funds to any extent! I have two carte blanche orders so to do.

"And I will do all your external business. I have my Swiss valet and two old Russian sergeants for you, both Siberian veterans.

"And so, Devol will arrange all your effects the moment your luggage arrives!"

Levassoff touched a bell. To the sturdy young Swiss who answered, Levassoff said: "Major Wardlawe is your master! You are relieved from all else!"

Turning to Wardlawe, the Consul said: "Give me all your letters and telegrams! I am to do all you wish! Here is your working room."

Three hours later, Wardlawe had reported by cable his arrival to his principals.

"As for Sternberg," said Levassoff, "he knows all, save that which you wish transmitted beyond him!"

Before the two-hours' carriage drive was over, Wardlawe was lost in admiration of Levassoff's mental gifts and his delicate reserve.

A dozen swordsmen ran at the side of the carriage, a precaution not lost on the American, who felt for his ready revolver.

When they had made a tour of the romantic environs, Levassoff quietly said: "I cannot take you to the clubs or expose you here!

"But, all the Consuls will quietly dine with us! Some of the foreign people, those 'without a record,' too, and, I fancy I can show you all the jugglers, geisha girls, tea girls and the local lions and lionesses to a good advantage! They all come to us, as the climate precludes exertion and even political dissension.

"My best friend here, strangely, is the English Consul, even though—three months ago—our fleets hastily summoned, lay here with loaded guns at only a cable's length distance.

"And now I shall have to ask you to kindly remain within my 'compound' unless I take you out! I am really an inviolable personage here, and I know every straggler."

The days glided away in every possible genial festivity, while Sergeant Crampton made himself a chum with Devol.

The stout veteran had found a tent under Wardlawe's very windows, where he mounted guard like a provost officer.

But two cares rested now on Wardlawe's mind.

So far he had not heard of the arrival of the "Water Witch" at Nicolaievsk, the mouth of the great Amoor, and the mysterious messenger of the Queen of the Adighè was as yet formless mystery.

The bearer of the other ring! The keeper of this strange tryst around the world.

But the beautiful "Hiogo Maru" lay out in the harbor, bound for Vladivostock, on the fourth evening,

and, in the calm moonlight, after a tête-à-tête dinner, the genial Levassoff proposed a visit to the ship!

When the two men stepped into the first passing "rickshaw," Sergeant Crampton strode out, and laid his hand on his master's arm.

"Never mind, Sergeant! You keep guard here! See that no one fumbles among my goods! Our haunting foe is far off now!"

Without a word, the bronzed veteran saluted and then, strode back to his master's rooms.

A single large sampan lay ready at the strand as the four coolies hailed the lazy boatman, who woke as a powerful Japanese ran down the granite quay and pushed the frail boat far out into the tidewater, a hundred feet deep but twenty yards from the shore!

Lulled by the lovely evening, lost in the silence of the throbbing night, Wardlawe was gazing upon Levassoff's kindly face, when, with an awkward movement, the strange Japanese changed his place, without a word of warning!

In a moment the low, cranky craft was overturned, and the swift tide swept Wardlawe a score of yards away from the boat!

The loose seats, oars and platforms were swept past Wardlawe, who, vigorously swimming, soon had a couple of light planks under his arms to aid him.

With yells and outcries, the three Japanese boatmen were all aiding the rich Levassoff, who now frantically clutched the waterlogged boat.

As Wardlawe safely paddled away to the shore, he could see a dark head bobbing up and down in the surging efforts of a swimmer, and, yet, before he reached the boat steps, a dripping form fled away, disappearing in the growing darkness.

When the two Europeans were safe on the shore, the anxious Japanese sampan men surrounded them, while an attracted boat shot out to rescue the floating fittings of the light skiff.

"Are you armed, Wardlawe?" cried Levassoff. "If so, draw your pistol! We may be attacked even here! There is some foul play!"

Hailing a passing carriage, while the Major stood

on guard, the Consul sternly said: "Some cowardly villain has tried to drown us in this swift tideway!"

He tossed a couple of Mexican dollars to the appeased Japanese with whom he had been conversing in their own musical tongue.

One of the boatmen ran after the carriage as it gathered headway.

"What does he say?" cried the Major.

"Not a Japanese—a foreign devil! It was an American, dressed in Japanese clothes!" said Levassoff.

They were already safe in the Consular bungalow, enjoying their cheroots and a hot grog, when the young Consul detailed the deadly trick!

"These honest fellows thought that the stranger was surely one of our own party!"

With dexterity, the fellow, throwing his whole weight on the skiff's gunwale and leaning out, overturned the sampan with a quick jerk! He swam away like a duck, never turning his head!

"And I saw him flee up the quay!" growled Wardlawe.

"He looked twice as chunky as these half-sized chaps here, also!"

"It's a wonder that he did not wait, and then brain you with a club as you paddled out!" growled Levassoff. "This is your last outing!"

"A dangerous one!" mused the Major.

"I was swept around in a circle of a hundred and fifty yards before I could reach the dock! But for the two planks, the tide would have sucked me under!"

A moody silence ensued.

"I will send for Captain Walker, and have every man on the "Hiogo Maru" passed before his eye when you sail; and, by God! I'll put my own Cossack guard on board, with orders to sabre any hidden wretch! Baron Sternberg would ruin me for life if aught happened to you!"

And, without, Devol and Sergeant Crampton were now holding a serious council of war.

"I knew that something would happen! I felt it in my old bones!" growled the Sergeant. "The next chance is mine!"

He exhibited a short, heavy fowling piece, cut off to two feet in length. "These two barrels are crammed with buckshot! I will wing that fellow yet! He is a cool chap, too!"

It was on the eve of the arrival of the Shanghai P. and O. boat that a breathless messenger dashed into the villa with a telegraphic despatch from Nicolaievsk marked "Imperial affairs. Immediate."

Levassoff's shout of joy aroused Wardlawe as the Consul waved the paper over his head in triumph!

"The 'Water Witch' is now in the river, safely at Nicolaievsk! Crew and stores, vessel and supplies ready, and her speed makes her the 'Queen of the Amoor!'

"My American agent, with Freeman, Smith & Co. there, has sent the cipher despatch provided months ago by Dimitri Gorlitz's orders! Hurrah for Sternberg and Gorlitz!

"And so, we only need the 'man from Shanghai!'" gloomily said Wardlawe. "I am tired of dodging this veiled assassin!

"Remain here," soberly said the Consul. "I will go and arrange all with Walker! The mail-boat comes in at noon to-morrow! And I will have the 'Hiogo Maru' sail a day ahead of her time. She is secretly subsidized by our Government!"

An hour later, Wardlawe strolled down into the leafy garden, and, standing watching the glowing coal of his cheroot, inhaled the freshness of the evening.

The deep cut road was all silent. No laughing tea girls, no glittering-eyed Geishas cried "Ohio! Ohio," or the sweet "Sayonara!" in their meetings and partings.

An unusual loneliness oppressed the stern soldier. He had marked no stealthy followers. He forgot all the present in the one sigh of his heart.

"What a world of love would have been mine if Isabel had not been taken away from me in her youthful beauty, with her heart glowing with life's highest hopes!"

He leaned upon the low gates, and then gazed down

the road, where the perfumes of the overhanging branches filled the soft, summer night.

"The first of July! I am just in time! All is ready! Only the mysterious stranger!"

And then, as he spoke, a blinding flash obscured his vision!

Again, again, the report of a heavy pistol, as he darted back past the masonry angle of the gate piers!

"Fool!" his mind accused him, with lightning rapidity. He had left his own revolver on his table!

And then, as a dark form leaped into the gateway, a double discharge of a heavily loaded gun rang out!

Something leaped high into the air and then crashed down at his very feet, while Crampton stood sternly over the prostrate man, a loaded pistol in his hand!

"Settled at last!" roared Crampton, as the servants came rushing with lanterns and drawn sabres. "The double-barreled shotgun did his business!"

He turned the groaning man over, crying: "It's a Jap! No! By God!" he growled, snatching a lantern. "An American!"

When the gates were shut and the groaning assassin carried into the glare of the open doorway of the bungalow, Walter Wardlawe bent over the dying man. "You've done for me, you Yankee brute!" the assassin groaned. "I meant to have you, but your damned bodyguard has finished me!"

A gleam of recognition lit up Wardlawe's face. "You are —— ——"

"Sam Norris, the man you crippled for life on the train!" hissed the dying villain.

"I meant to get square! Berry sent me money to come home with. But, your cursed knife ruined my right hand! As valet, for billiards, cards, anything to turn a quick penny, you had crippled me! Now——" There was a gurgling flow of blood which choked the poor wretch's speech!

"That's all!" grimly said Sergeant Crampton, striding out to find his cast away shotgun in the flower beds.

When he returned, Major Wardlawe said sternly, "Let him be searched! I wish all his clothes! There

may be some hidden papers! I'll leave funds for his burial!"

Under the morning light, the Major closely examined the dead man's body. Yes! There was the tell-tale mark of the knife blindly used for defense in the attempted train robbery!

"It ruined his hand. See! Cut all the cords and stiffened it forever! But for this he could not have missed you! He fired three times, at five paces! The footprints prove that!"

Before the great English mail steamer swung up the long inlet, Major Warlawe was safely hidden in the cabin of the "Hiogo Maru," with Devol and the Sergeant on guard at the doors.

The two grizzled Russian sergeants stood on guard at the gangplank.

"You are to wait here!" said Alexei Levassoff.

"And I'll bring the agent whom neither you nor I have yet seen to meet you here! Once that you are done with him, the steamer sails at your nod! The dead wretch will be buried here, with no remark!

"And, all that has been found are these two one hundred pound Bank of England notes, sewed in his jerkin! We have taken all his clothes to pieces! And no one has seen his face here! The Japanese Chief of Police cannot trace him!

"Give the money to the Sailor's Hospital Fund!" said Woodlawe, "and put Mr. Sam Norris under the sod in any way you choose!"

"He should be flung to the fishes, for a sneaking assassin!" growled Crampton. "But, his fighting days are done!"

CHAPTER VII.

"TO ORDER."

Major Wardlawe gazed restlessly out of the cabin windows at the bewitching shores around him while the long hours of the afternoon dragged away.

Conversation was impossible, even with the sternly

defiant Sergeant Crampton, whose ready short shotgun now hung from his shoulder by a diagonally slung broad rubber band.

Neither of the men reverted to the dead Sam Norris, for whose taking off Consul Alexei Levassoff had agreed to make all due official explanations.

"He died in my compound, so he really was executed in Russia!" grimly said the startled Semitic official.

"You will have a full report on all his local surroundings before you sail!" said the Consul, "for even in this swarm of Chinese coolies, dwarfed Japanese and foreign sailor scum, there is a running human account kept! But, as the French say, 'The incident is closed!'"

Presages of misfortune still oppressed the American. "If Esmè's messenger has miscarried!" he gloomily thought. "Then she would be left, perhaps, with no second chance to carry out her strange designs!"

Cigar after cigar was lit and thrown away by him, while two men eagerly conversed in the office of the Russian Imperial Consulate upon the Bund.

Warily defiant, Levassoff had exacted every token of recognition from the tall Russian who had stalked into his office, presenting the passport of Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff, Merchant of the First Class, of Kharkov.

Levassoft regretted that a local anti-Semitic feeling had barred him from any visit to Kharkov, and so he was unable to verify the stranger's real identity.

"Merchant?" he grumbled. "He looks more like a guardsman of the Czarina's Chevalier Regiment! And his fluent Russian! It is that of the Court, of the salon, of the Yacht Club! No buyer trading dialect in this strange fellow!

"Even Rezoff's attire, his rings, his cigarette case and social manners seemed to be 'borrowed for the occasion!'"

Finally, the stranger, producing a telegram from Baron Sternberg, addressed to him at Shanghai, said: "I knew your uncle very well for many years! Though he is not orthodox, he is my trusted friend! Deliver me over the papers—give me your aid, or else—cable

for yourself to Baron Sternberg, who will at once report this delay to those who sent me!

"I can see very well that you are afraid you might make an error. So you may! Any needless delay to me here might prevent Madame la Comtesse Ilka Plessky from becoming her husband's chief ornament at the Court of Portugal."

"The papers are not in my hands," confusedly said the excited Consul. "I will take you to the person who now awaits you! But, in an affair of such magnitude, I should certainly exchange messages with Baron Sternberg."

"In God's name, be it so!" impatiently cried the merchant. "I shall be here for some days! I wish you to charter me any idle steamboat to take me to the mouth of the Amoor; and so, you will have all the time you need! Meanwhile, write your cablegram, and let me add one word!"

In gaping wonder, Levassoff traced a cipher despatch, to which the merchant laughingly added a single word.

"Send that," he said. "Now for the agent! I only have halfway instructions."

"Will he know you?" timidly demanded Levassoff.

"I fancy so," dryly said the stranger, bringing out a beautiful Moscow watch. "I will go and dine, and return in an hour. Be ready for me then!"

In vain Levassoff protested and offered his own hospitality.

"Afterwards, we can break bread and salt, but not till you know me," said Rezoff tauntingly.

"Your man and the papers are both on that ship!" coldly said the now frightened Consul.

"Very good! I will return in an hour!" sternly cried Rezoff.

"In the meantime, look up any small Japanese steamer or idle steam yacht ready for use. Do not spare my money; I want a good vessel; pay anything if you can get immediate service!"

"A strange Russian!" discontentedly mused Levassoff. "He neither lies nor tries to probe me! A fellow evidently used to command, and, I fancy, one

who would starve as a merchant, whatever he might do as an officer or man of great estate!

"However," he sighed, "I did not choose him!"

It was eight o'clock when Levassoff's steam launch glided alongside the "Hiogo Maru."

Not a word had been exchanged between the Consul and his queer visitor, both smoking with an affected carelessness when they mounted the companionway.

The quick salute of the old Russian sergeants was not lost on Levassoff, nor the curt, soldierly return of the unconsciously trapped traveler.

"So, my merchant has served!" mused Levassoff.

"Let him, then, remain closed up in his shell! I will keep within my official armor!" A single light was gleaming in the cabin where Major Wardlawe sat, his wearied head resting on his hand. "You speak French?" glumly questioned Levassoff, whereat Merchant Rezoff nodded. "He knows no word of Russian! There is your man!"

And, with a well studied reticence, the Consul passed out and sought Captain Walker, leaving the two men alone.

Starting forward, Wardlawe approached the tall stranger, whose waving beard disguised his face in the semi-darkness.

And then, forgetting all his prudence in the utter amazement of the moment, the American sprang back as if on guard.

"You!" he stammered. "YOU!"

He stood there spellbound, as Merchant Rezoff, laying down a formal visiting card inscribed with his titles, laid before him on the table the signet ring given to him by Esmè Chilkoff: "Je demande des renseignements et des papiers 'au nom d'Agar!'" quietly said the tall Englishman. "Avez vous une bague pareille pour me montrer?"

Then, seating himself quietly, the putative merchant traced the words: "In the name of Agar," with difficulty, in the English character!

Wardlawe mechanically held out his own ring, which Rezoff carefully studied, while the American strode to the door.

Leaping forward, Allan Law caught the Major's wrist, and then, with a glance of mingled command and entreaty, laid his finger on his lip!

Wardlawe bowed gravely, with a sickening feeling surging through his heart and sought out Levassoff.

"It is the right man!" he whispered in English, 'a stranger to me; but, he has proofs beyond all cavil! Come in and be a witness to my delivery of the papers.

"Of course, he speaks only French and Russian. I am impatient to be done with this dangerous commission. Follow me!"

Half an hour later the great cabin table was covered with unfolded papers, invoices and documents.

"It is to the Consul officially that I look, Monsieur Rezoff," said Wardlawe, in French, "for the regularity of all these transfers and deliveries!"

The tall merchant bowed.

"I am in the hands of my own representative!" he gravely said.

Before an hour, the Consul, busy with pen and blue stenciled seals, had effected the legal transfer of the "Water Witch," her stores and supplies from Major Walter Wardlawe, owner of the bills of lading, "To order," to the merchant Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff.

"I believe that this is all!" at last said the now satisfied official.

"At my Consulate to-morrow, Serge Alexandrovitch," gravely said Levassoff, "I will issue you the sea letter, register and river papers of this vessel and inscribe her as your own personal property and licensed to sail the waters of the Amoor and the adjacent seas under the privileges of the Amoor Navigation Company!"

Both his listeners started as Levassoff read a document of instructions from the Ministry of the Interior, Siberian Division.

"This, I believe, covers all the personal transfer, and I will now stamp and countersign full receipts for all these numbered documents, the vessel and her findings, which relieve you, Major Wardlawe, of all accountability to any persons whatsoever.

"To you, Serge Alexandrovitch, will be delivered

by me, on shore, the letters of available credit, the list and passports for your crew and your own visad passport!"

Both the men interested were now standing, gazing sternly at each other like mortal antagonists, à la barrière.

"Is there anything more?" demanded the Consul.

Neither of the two men spoke, but Rezoff quickly gathered up all the papers.

"When does my steamer sail?" at last demanded Wardlawe in a broken voice.

His mechanical French was accented with a tone of resentment and even cold defiance.

"I may wish to know that I have left nothing behind me undone! I may not return here!"

"You are very wise, Monsieur le Major," answered Levassoff, mystified at the sullen behavior of the two men.

"I will hold this steamer from noon till three tomorrow and then, come on board and then close up all your affairs. I beg that you will not leave the boat! And I can give you then a final official certificate of discharge, and you can send any last dispatches which you may choose."

Clapping his hands, Levassoff called the chief Chinese steward. "You will honor me, gentlemen," he said, "with joining me in a toast to His Imperial Majesty!"

"Enemies already!" mused the Consul as he gazed on the men, sullenly drinking the perfunctory toast.

As if shot, Rezoff suddenly sprang up.

"And so, Monsieur," he said, speaking in a smothered tone. "As the Consul will close all transactions between us, I shall not have the honor of seeing you again!"

Grasping his mercantile portfolio, the disguised Allan Law bowed, while Wardlawe stood on the other side of the table, deeply bowing, but with no extended hand.

"Adieu, Monsieur Rezoff!" he said coldly. "Adieu et, bon voyage!"

Alexei Levassoff had passed out of the cabin when

Allan Law hastened back for a moment. "My stick!" he said, as he strode away.

Levassoff was already in his boat, when Allan Law grasped Wardlawe's idly hanging hands.

"Swear to keep my secret!" he cried hoarsely, in English. "If you meet me again—neither to save my life, my honor, nor my freedom—will you recognize me?"

There was an agony in the young man's eyes which touched Wardlawe's stormy heart.

"I swear!" he muttered. "And, I will keep my oath, so help me God!"

Before he could raise his head the churning of the screw told of the departure of the launch.

"Closer than a brother, he sticks to me, this fellow!" cried the unhappy American, "and to what purpose! He, too, is as wax in her hands!

"And neither he nor I dare to name her name! What devil's mystery is this?

"The lurking assassin, this secret chase over the world! And yet he was thunder-struck at seeing me! We are both fools of some mad caprice of this strange woman! Fooled to the top of her bent! And to what end? Both of us conjured 'In Agar's name!'"

When Wardlawe awoke the sun was shining into his cabin windows, and he mentally registered a vow. "She can forget me so soon! I can now forget all! I am now 'free from all entangling alliances.'

"And by the God above, if we meet again he shall have but a soldier's short shrift! A fair field, a stern welcome, and no favors! He dared not even breathe her name! And I will not, so help me God! till I see her!"

It was after breakfast, while the ship was noisy with the clatter of impending departure, that Sergeant Crampton made his morning report. "I have received the report of the Japanese Chief Police, Major!" he cheerily cried. "The brute whom I shot came alone from America, and he worked his way as a coal heaver over to Japan in the 'Tokio,' and slaved as an oiler on his passage down from Yokohama. He only left a tattered traveling rug and a battered brandy flask in the

low tea-house where he passed a few nights. He had paid for a week's lodging and swapped his rugs in the bazaar for a Japanese 'longshoreman's cotton suit!"

"Enough that the poor devil is dead!" said Wardlawe. Evidently there was nothing left behind him!"

"Hundred pound Bank of England notes do not fly around the world!" stubbornly said Crampton.

"Let us forget him!" gravely said his master.

"In a week we will be at Vladivostock!

"In two weeks you shall be helping me to peg out the works at Dui! I have a telegram that a technical working party of sixty are already assembled for our coming! Let us leave all these memories behind!"

"He stuck to us 'closer than a brother!'" growled Crampton, "and he would have it! I do not regret killing him!"

"The man was clearly demented!" said Wardlawe, walking out to see the beautiful sampan girls—young Dianas—force their light barks through the crystal blue waves.

"I wonder—I wonder," mused the agitated American, "whether those two notes came from the bluff Berry or this false Englishman or imitation Russian—whatever he is—'the lightning-change artist' "Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff!

"I will have Levassoff spy on this young fellow's movements! And yet, Sternburg gave him a high character! What the devil is he up to? And the boat, 'Qu'allait-il faire dans cette galère'"

Alexei Levassoff had tossed sleeplessly on his couch all night, mystified by the coldness and apparent aversion of the two agents of some mysterious power, greater even than the moneyed syndicate behind Sternberg of London and Frankfort.

With all his Semitic ingenuity, he had failed to extract a word from Rezoff, who swept the moonlit waters of the bay with his eyes, anxiously seeking some unemployed craft.

And this strange "Merchant of the first-class" had coldly declined Levassoff's hospitality, the one mark of distrust in the pleasure-loving Orient!

"Either he fears me or he is so far above me that

he will not be under obligation!" was the Consul's saddening reflection.

Reflections which were revived by the arrival in the morning of a private cablegram from Baron Sternberg: "Let Rezoff have all he desires to the end of your powers! Treat him as you would me! Your very future depends upon it!"

Beyond verifying the locking up of the papers for the night in the Consular safe, Rezoff made no sign save his "good night" bow. "I will be at your Consulate the moment it opens, ready to transact business!" haughtily said the stranger.

To Levassoff's offers of personal assistance, Rezoff replied: "I wish for nothing! I have local correspondents here, staunch Russian merchants!"

By noon the two men had finished all the details of the transfer of Wardlawe's trust, and with a grave bow, Rezoff acknowledged Levassoff's careful transmittal of his uncle's positive endorsements.

"I will not forget the Baron's promptness!" remarked Rezoff, as he departed with the Consular Secretary to visit every unemployed craft in the harbor.

The Consul was equally nonplussed by Major Wardlawe's reception of the whole papers of quittance without even a reference to Rezoff.

"It is a triangular duel of silence!" mused the startled Consul, "and I will be heartily glad to see them both go!"

The "blue peter" was flying at the mizzen truck of the "Hiogo Maru" when the Consul departed, laden with Wardlawe's last cablegrams and his final directions.

"Letters, telegrams and all are to be sent direct to Admiral Lemacheffsky, commanding at Vladivostock.

"In anything else use your own judgment, save only a complete silence as to me, my whereabouts, my doings, and above all," he said, after thanking his courteous host, "not a word of me or my designs, even my faintest intentions, to this stranger! I conclude Rezoff to be some merchant engaged in a secret speculation!

"He may have secret relations with my principles, but I never saw him before, and I do not wish to meet him again!"

"Clearly a case of mutual dislike!" mused Levassoff, when he cast off the tow-line of his launch at the silvery straits.

The last glass of champagne had been gayly emptied, the captain had received every human being on the ship to prevent any skulking "illegal man," and these had been scanned also by Sergeant Crampton the keen-eyed Devol and the two grim Russian sergeants.

"I think that we have left the foe dead behind us!" cheerfully said Sergeant Crampton when Levassoff gave him his thousand cheroots for the voyage.

But victory settled down on Levassoff's agitated soul when he read Wardlawe's despatch to Baron Sternberg, which awaited being put into cipher.

"Your nephew is a prime of hosts; all successful; all achieved; everything more than satisfactory. Telegraph my departure, agent's arrival and 'Water Witch's' readiness, as agreed. Send all other cablegrams direct to Admiral Lemacheffsky!"

"My work is done! These men will not meet again!" sighed Levassoff in a happy relief, as he steamed back to the Consulate.

Hardly had his secret reports been flashed over the Danish cable when the tall form of Rezoff darkened the door, followed by a bluff Russian coasting captain.

"I find that our good friend here goes to Emperor's Bay with the 'Sibir," and I have persuaded him to advance his voyage a week and to proceed direct with me to Nicolaievsk, landing me there and coming back to Emperor's Bay."

"If you will change his sea letter and clearance, he will sail to-night! My luggage and effects are already on board!"

"That is," stammered stout Captain Osip Danieloff, "if you certify to the person's character, and identity, as well as his business, and—I see my money!"

The Consul laughed cheerily. "My dear old Cap-

tain! Not only will I do this, but I will telegraph to Baron Knorp at Habaroffka to instruct the commander at Nicolaievsk that this voyage is by my order!"

"I will now make out your new clearance papers, so you can get back to your ship!"

"That's good!" growled Danieloff. "I can pick up fifty passengers this afternoon!"

"Have them all on board at four o'clock!" sternly said Rezoff. "We sail at five! Here is your money—a thousand pounds in Bank of England notes!"

"Will you get me Russian gold for these?" doubtfully said the skipper, eying the paper, but overjoyed at his windfall of good luck.

"Peterson!" said the Consul, "take this man to the bank and get him gold for these! Keep the notes for me! I want to make a home remittance. So, Captain, be off to your boat! I will bring Serge Alexandrovitch on board myself, and deliver you your papers at four!"

The happy sailor darted away, as the Consul turned to his strange visitor.

"And now I am entirely at your service. What can I do for you?"

"Very little!" simply said Rezoff.

"Nothing beyond a complete set of sailing charts and river maps of the Amoor, also the charts to cover Corea, Saghalien, the Siberian coast and Japan, I may stay out here for the whole season!

"All my passports and other papers I leave here for you to properly arrange!"

Since the tall stranger had seen the masts of the "Hiogo Maru" disappear beyond the outer forts, the merchant seemed to be another man.

And so, Levassoff, noting this buoyant change of mood, in an earnest voice said: "For my uncle's sake, join me at dinner! I will send my carriage at two to any place which you may name, and take you on board at four."

The merchant frankly grasped Levassoff's outstretched hand.

"Gladly!" he said. "Now that this American is gone—they are strange people—I will be at the Hong-

kong and Shanghai Bank here at two. Can you step in and identify my signature, officially, on my letter of credit? I may wish to draw drafts from Nicolaiesk to some extent, payable either in Japanese yens, Russian paper, or English gold!"

An air of freedom from care, of manly decision, and a new gayety of demeanor animated the stalwart Rezoff.

And so, Levassoff happily sat down to achieve the mountainous papers of the Russian law, required by this deviated voyage.

"It is some great money scheme, and, this Rezoff, is a sly dog! He feared the other fellow's Yankee curiosity.

And the last lingering doubt as to the real Russian status of his visitor vanished, when, at the appointed time, the Consul saw the letter of credit, issued from Frankfort, in the name of the Rothschild's, bearing the seldom used three stars of unlimited credit, and the personal signature of his uncle, the London manager.

"It is some giant tea speculation, some great new mercantile enterprise," mused Levassoff, as the two sat down in the villa to a parting dinner.

Though, only "orthodox" on the surface, Levassoff duly marked Rezoff's ante-prandial devotions at the golden icon with which the Imperial portraits duly ornamented the grand dining hall.

As an adroit trap, the sly Consul had directed every Russian dish of note to be prepared, and, as he gazed at this notable trencher man, and saw his well-bred familiarity with the hundred refinements of a Muscovite table, Levassoff laughed at his suspicions.

"Bred a Russian—from the cradle up!" he smilingly decided, when Rezoff abandoned his fluent French, heartily saying: "I am a man of the people, and I detest all foreign tongues. Let us talk only Russian. But to that Yankee, I was forced to use the language of the dancing master. As for German, I despise it! Only peddlers speak German, in our Kherson, our beloved Little Russia."

Story and anecdote, jest and song, flowed from Rezoff's bearded lips, and Levassoff's conquest was

complete, when he found that his visitor was versed in the lore of old Poland, and knew every city of Volhynia, Wilna, Grodno, Warsaw, and the whole "Dark Land."

When, at last, they stood on the deck of the "Sibir," the Consul drew the Captain aside: "Treat this man as if he were my brother! He is a Russian merchant of enormous wealth, and his favor may lead on to your fortune!"

The round eyes of the sailor twinkled. "He owns my ship, if you say so!" cried the sailor, happy in his two bags of golden Imperials, a private perquisite of his own.

The "Sibir," a stout, powerful steamer of three hundred tons, now strained at her moorings.

"Look at her!" cried Osip Danieloff. "She has made an annual run to Khamschatka, and, once took the Governor General to East Cape! It is a lucky voyage, a blessed voyage!"

When they emptied the champagne cup, Rezoff drew Alexei Levassoff aside. "Here is a cipher dispatch to your uncle! Send it, and when you are Minister to Portugal, I will come and see you, unless, before that, I may meet you and the Countess Ilka Plessky at Skierniwice!"

"You know my wife's country place, then?" cried the astounded man, starting back.

"I was educated at Warsaw," heartily said Rezoff. "The Kharkov University was closed 'in the troubles,' and I have hunted all over Poland. Some day, we will have a race together, I hope, through your beautiful park!"

"Who and what are you?" the puzzled official cried.

"Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff!" quietly said the young man. "Only a merchant, but one of your uncle's nearest friends! I leave you but one charge! Never mention my name or whereabouts to that Yankee, should he write to ask, or ever return here! It might endanger my business, and affect your own promotion to a diplomatic post, Portugal, or some other."

"Gorlitz, at San Francisco, wants it also, but both of you will be suited, if both keep silence and continue as in the past. Gorlitz shall go to Siam!"

"And, any mail, any telegrams?" gasped Levassoff.

"All to Baron Knorp, the Governor at Habaroffka! And now, adieu! It is the parting hour!"

Tossed up and down in the bubbling wake of the departing boat, the Consul watched the "Sibir" move swiftly on beyond the forts.

"Strange, strange," mused the relieved official. "These men are drawn closer than brothers, and yet something holds them further apart than any mortal enmity!"

"Sternberg knows, of course," reflected Levassoff, as the launch darted away to the shore. "And he will tell me nothing!"

But the next evening a cablegram was brought to Alexei Levassoff as he sat in the glittering circle of a great Consular dinner at the Nagasaki Club.

Levassoff forgot the gleaming bosoms of the Geisha girls, the dark eyes of the sweet-voiced singers, in the words of Baron Sternberg.

"Approval of all. Your reports fully satisfactory. Orders for your return and promotion to Portugal within six months!"

"And so, I have made no mistake!" the happy man sighed. "I will find out what Osip Danieloff has to say on his return. Rezoff is either a splendid mystery or else a man charged with some new convenient conquest, an heir to the glories of Yermak, the Cossack and the Stroganoffs!"

While he spoke, the great liner, "Hiogo Maru" was gliding on past castled Tchusima, to touch at Fusan and Gensan, on her way to the 'Golden Horn,' the beautiful Gate of the East, while the 'Sibir' was swiftly creeping up the shores of Niphon and Yezo, to coast along by Saghalien, to the mouth of the mighty Amoor.

Ten days later, as the gunboat "Seevoutch" dashed into Dui harbor, Major Wardlawe saw the "Sibir" puffing along in the green waters of the Gulf of Tartary towards Nicolaievsk.

In his two days' stay at Vladivostock, Major Wardlawe learned, by chance, of Allan Law's masquerading trip.

For, in the Governor's palace, the courtly old Admiral said: "I must hasten you over to Dui on my despatch boat! I had intended to send you to Emperor's Bay on my yacht, and thence across to Saghalien on the 'Sibir,' but it seems a rich merchant, one Rezoff, has chartered her for a direct trip to the mouth of Amoor, and the 'Sibir' only lands coming back. I shall keep a close eye on this fellow! They dodge in from Japan, but—his papers are all right! Levassoff sent his telegram to Baron Knorp on through me!"

"What would happen if he were caught in an illegal enterprise, this stranger?" said Wardlawe, already a brother to his genial host.

"Shot!" sternly said the old sea dog. "Knorp would send him down to me, under guard! I alone have the power of life and death! Knorp is merely my sub-governor!"

"And so, he is on that boat!" mused Wardlawe, watching the interchange of fluttering signals. "I wonder if he knows that Lemacheffsky has the power of life and death here, without recourse to Saint Petersburg!"

The stern words of the old Admiral haunted Wardlawe in the two days of his almost kingly reception by the officials at Vladivostock.

Even Sergeant Crampton and Devol, with the two guards, had been "mobbed" with truly Siberian hospitality.

"All's fair in love and war!" mused the Major. "Let him look out for his own head! He has closed every door on his escape, for I have sworn to keep his secret!"

And so Wardlawe gazed gloomily after the boat, now hull down on the northern horizon.

A mighty struggle had rent his bosom! "An English spy—a false character—suppose that this fellow has artfully deceived Esmè Chilkoff! The Ignatieffs seem to have taken a great fancy to him!"

"And yet, she has hidden her secret purposes from

all! This strange being knows no ordinary human responsibility, and so, Mr. Allan Law is playing with fire!

"To attempt to warn her, to warn him of his danger, to meddle with this secret game—either course might defeat all my great purposes here, and break up Marsden and Mott's future enterprises! I fancy, however, that I have seen the last of my English friend!

"But, if he is taken with any tell-tale notes—intended for the British Foreign Ministry—these Siberian Cossacks will hew him to pieces! Does he know the deadly game he plays? or is he, too, as wax in her hands? I have loyally done my duty! Let him, now, guard his own head! If he is playing false to Esmè, his punishment will be well merited, and she will abandon him to his fate without a sigh! But he would be in a felon's grave long before she would know! It is a case of the Lady and the Tiger!"

Two days later, Major Wardlawe was domiciled with the Governor of Dui and invested with the powers of a scientific autocrat. In the great log palaces of the officers he found almost a Parisian luxury; while the stern fortifications, the frowning batteries, the heavy garrison, and the extended convict settlements proved that the Russian Bear had evidently come to stay.

A splendid engineering force, a competent working staff, with drawing and model rooms, were ready, with all the detailed plans of the unknown island, whose thirty thousand square miles enclose vast undeveloped riches.

Carriages, steam launches, mounted messengers, all awaited the man whom the Admiral honored, while the splendid mess, the General's table and the officers homes were open to the visitor with a fraternal hospitality.

"Despotism can easily be made splendid!" mused Wardlawe, gazing at his great quarters, already decked by Crampton and Devol, his guard and retinue, with the priceless furs of Northern Siberia.

"It's not a bad exile!" gaily cried Colonel Orloff, Wardlawe's collaborator. He swept his hand around

the splendid room. Pictures, the journals of Paris, London and Berlin, plate, all the luster of luxury, abounded, while pianos and a superb band gave the musical distractions needed.

"You see, there are other things here than furs, fisheries, exhaustless frosts and unopened mines!" laughed Orloff. "We have our clubs, our biweekly theatre, a weekly ball, the regular interchange of dinners, and, twice a week, the steamer from Vladivostock.

"Next year we will have a cable, and so, tie the outside world to us!"

"It is almost a frontier paradise!" said the American.

"Not so bad," laughed Orloff, "for us who can go away! We get double pay and promotion here! The garrison is three thousand veterans!"

"Two steam corvettes are here. I will send you 'round the island when your work will permit!"

"But those ladies, those whom I met last night at the ball?" said Wardlawe.

"You notice that the General's family was not present," slyly said Orloff. "All those beauties are convicts, and they make our exile less irksome and their own imprisonment less severe!"

"These women in silks and satins?" the astonished man cried.

"Precisely! Our manners are of the Court, whatever our morals are, and, chains can be lightly worn," laughed Orloff.

"When we have used every moment of this golden month, when the work is done which makes me a General, and I hope enrich you, I will open your eyes! But, to our plans!"

And so, day by day, as the vast constructions assumed definite form, and the final projets were despatched by express steamers, to enable bids to be telegraphed by the National Works, Wardlawe locked his lips upon many discoveries which made him rub his eyes as if in a dream.

Long before the locations were achieved and the great council met for its final labors, the chiefs at San

Francisco knew of the successful début of their chosen representative.

And Wardlawe's reports, his private telegrams, were deftly forwarded, even the anxious Levassoff communicating by cable, in three days, with ease.

"Wonders of power and wealth, of science and organization!" mused the American as the six weeks of his stay flew by in a triumphant professional masterpiece.

"In another week," laughed Colonel Orloff, "you and I can take all over to Admiral Lemacheffsky. His final approval, the last orders given from St. Petersburg, and then, you can telegraph to your chiefs the results. I shall claim you for a return visit to Saghalien, and in two weeks I can show you all the inner mysteries of our strange colony! Remember, you are a member of our Governer's mess for life!"

"I fear, Orloff," said the American, "that my people will send others back to set up all these great works next year! I am billeted for South Africa, to carry out some long-deferred mining plans!"

"Then," said the gay Engineer Colonel, "I will hail you next at St. Petersburg when I am called home to be promoted general!"

In all the wild life of this island kingdom juggled away from Japan, Walter Wardlawe, at the head of a hundred specialists, had forgotten the "Sibir" and its lonely passenger.

"Esmè Chilkoff!" he sighed. "I must wait for her to call me back! For six months, even a year must elapse before she can effect the veiled purposes of her secret campaign!

"She has perhaps already forgotten me! She has also used me! I have been 'as wax in her hands!' But 'Rezoff,' the man whose name I dare not even speak, how fares he?"

It was in these early days of August when the Princess Chilkoff walked alone the park of Count Ignatieff's splendid summer residence, near Kief.

Hidden from all eyes during July, in her splendid palace prison on the Neva, in vain the Baroness Fad-

aieff urged her beautiful mistress to go away to the leafy summer woods.

All the nobility were hidden in their summer homes, and yet the Circassian obstinately lingered in the granite wilderness.

When Dr. Alexis Pauloff descended in state, backed by Madame Ignatieff, he was met with a will as unbending as his own.

"I will come to you in August, Natalie!" said the anxious woman, whose eyes burned with a strange luster.

"Leave me! I will have it so!"

Even Colonel Prince Sacha Menchikoff received the continued refusal of Ali Roustan to admit him to his mistress' salon.

"The Barina was at home, but she received no one!"

And so Menchikoff's superb baskets of flowers, his fiery letters remained unanswered and all unacknowledged.

"Half devil, half angel, this peerless Tcherkess!" groaned the reckless Menchikoff, as in desperation he joined a party of gallants bound for Paris. Yet, gayly crying in his own heart, "There is no other!"

But the world forgetting, in these July days, Esmè Chilkoff, with a heightened color, grasped eagerly the telegrams from Baron Sternberg, which were a mystery even to the detectives of the Secret Police.

These acute investigators well knew that the great financier handled the foreign affairs of the young beauty, who, while secretly controlled in her movements, was left to the enjoyment of a great and unknown estate, handled by the Government, the results of the allotment of her Circassian revenues as well as Boris Chilkoff's inheritance.

The arrival and departure of Wardlawe from Nagasaki, the "brother Ahmed" of her strange adoption, the departure of "Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff" for Nicolaiesk, brought to her a measure of relief.

And in the middle of July a few brief words had told her that the "Water Witch" had left Nicolaiesk on its voyage to the juncture of the Argoun and the Shilka. But as the early days of burning August

slowly crawled by, the daily recurring silence of her loyal agent Sternberg, now at London, weighed upon her heart.

In vain, her guardians tenderly appealed to her!

Though a hectic red flushed her hollowed cheek; though she dragged listlessly around the darkened palace, she guarded a proud and bitter silence.

And it was with a sullen defiance that she submitted at last, only when the Czarina sent a lady in waiting to announce the Imperial pleasure.

"You must choose some summer retreat for two months or else, the Court Physician will be obliged to execute the Empress' orders!"

And then, she turned her face to "Mon Plaisir," at Kiev.

"No tidings, no tidings!" she muttered.

"Allah forbid that his sacrifice should be in vain! That his death and my heartbreak would follow on the discovery of this man's mission!

"Then—even then—I dare not seek the truth! It is the silence of Death!"

And yet, while she chafed like a caged eagle; while the Count and his wife exchanged glances of alarm, in her dreams her shadowy mother Ayesha seemed to stoop down and kiss the heart-torn woman.

"Be of good cheer!" the loving phantom cried. "Yet a little longer! Wait and hope!"

And so, Esmè Chilkoff only smiled sadly when the Countess Natalie Ignatieff whispered: "Shall I telegraph to Sacha Menchikoff to make us a month's visit? He is at Aix-les-Bains with the King of Greece!"

"Send no telegram," faltered Esmè; "there is but one man alive whose face is always in my heart! Sacha is a gallant Russian, but, he is never born to claim my hand!"

And, while the Countess Natalie wondered, in her stricken heart the girl murmured "Agar! Come back to me!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TIGER HUNT!

It was while Wardlawe, with feverish eagerness, attacked his great work at Dui, and the Princess Esmè Chilkoff chafed, in a mad unrest, in her Neva palace, that the stout "Sibir" crawled through the fog banks of the Straits of Tartary and slowly entered the lonely flood of the Amoor.

Captain Osip Danieloff now divided Levassoff's doubts as to the "Merchant Rezoff."

"Certain, he is a millionaire," growled the Captain, "and he knows every inch of Russia, but the voyage shows him to be a sailor out and out. A devil of a 'Kharkov trader' this!"

And yet, the Captain had more than met his match.

For he was eager to earn Consul Levassoff's promised bribe for a secret report of every action of the mysterious passenger.

Seated in the chart room, smoking ceaseless cheroots, the disguised Englishman had passed his ten days in a careful study of the great stream on whose banks the mighty Genghis founded the Tartar Empire.

But when they entered the great flood, two miles wide at the mouth, note-book in hand, Rezoff gave himself up to a scrutiny of the giant stream, which in its course of three thousand miles, drains eight hundred thousand square miles.

Born of the triple union of the Shilka, the Argoun, and the Sungari, its destiny seems to be to open Mongolia, Manchuria, and Primorsk to the ruthless Russian.

"Water leaves no trail," murmured Allan Law, as he bethought him of the strange command not to open his "sealed orders" until past Habaroffka.

"Just as well," he murmured. "And I will not go ashore there if I can avoid it. Russian hospitality is too apt to become a crucial social investigation of one's past, present, and future. My safest motto is the

Shakespearian phrase 'Paucas Palabras!' I can get my whole river permit for the voyage to Nertchinsk here, from the Governor of Nicolaievsk, by a liberal present to his First Aide, if the old golden charm works as usual!"

And so, silent and watchful, Rezoff stood on the bridge with Captain Danieloff as the "Sibir" rushed along, driven at full speed over the twenty-two miles from the river's mouth to where Nicolaievsk lay, in dense primeval forests, on the left bank of the huge artery of the future Empire of the East.

Rezoff's luggage and stores were all on the deck, as Danieloff, pointing to four heavy batteries, handed his glass to the merchant of Kharkov.

"Hourra!" he cried. "There she lies! Now, as I can not approach the shore, I will round to, send you ashore in my long boat, take a turn up the river, and sail away out of the mouth to-night."

"In two days, I will be at Emperor's Bay! What have you to say to Consul Levassoff?"

"Compliments! Greeting! And that you are a jolly good fellow! The prince of skippers! That's all."

"Any letters?" demanded the curious Captain.

"I never write letters!" gloomily answered Rezoff. "Not even to ladies! It would have saved much trouble in the world if the art of writing never had been invented!"

"Hello! what's this?" cried Danieloff, as a smart little steam launch, the tiniest of motor boats, sped over the waters towards them, towing an empty barge.

"Some one for me, I fancy!" quietly replied Rezoff.

Before them, five hundred log houses were scattered a half mile along the banks, where eight thousand people held the trust of the Amoor for the Czar.

A heavy corvette was anchored out in mid-stream, and a half dozen torpedo boats were nested under the sheds of a substantial looking naval station.

Steam chimneys poured out black smoke, and the mile and a quarter of the river's breath was covered with canoes, fishing, and pleasure boats.

"The Barin Rezoff!" cried a good humored manly

voice, as a heavy set Russian of middle age tumbled up the companion way.

Danieloff stared, while "Rezoff" advanced and greeted the newcomer with a Russian hug and a kiss on each cheek.

"Slip into my cabin," said the disguised Englishman, as he noted the ship's engines slowed, and the sailors tumbling his effects into the barge.

"Ivan Petroff, Sailing Master!" briefly said the bearded stranger, handing a little note to his new master.

With kindling eyes, Rezoff read the few lines traced by Dimitri Gorlitz, the San Francisco Consul.

Calling for brandy and soda, Rezoff lit a cigar with a taper made of the note and saw its last film crumble into ashes.

In five minutes the little launch was puffing away to a queer-shaped vessel lying a half a mile below the town.

Danieloff was already on his bridge, his eyes fixed upon the central thread of the great stream, easily marked by floating logs torn from the forests on the Baikal.

"Nothing suspicious!" growled the captain on the "Sibir," "but that he smokes cheroots and drinks brandy and soda instead of using our cigarettes and vodki! And I've really nothing to tell Levassoff, but I have earned ten thousand roubles to lay away for 'Mania' and the children! A devilish close-mouthed fellow! Now for a quick home run!"

The "Sibir" was tearing down the stream at a fifteen-knot gait, when Allan Law stepped on the deck of the strange-looking "Water Witch," whose twin screws were slowly revolving, while the duplicated click! click! of the injectors smote pleasantly on Rezoff's ear.

The broad, low "Water Witch" lay like a duck on the water, two hundred yards from the shore, where a clump of Tunguse and Gilliak natives stolidly watched the unknown steam monster, already known on the Amoor as the "Water Devil."

"The Barin Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff!" cried

the sailing master in a loud voice to the assembled crew of fourteen, who touched their caps in salute and then silently returned to their duties.

Passing into the low cabin, the secret agent of the Amoor Navigation Company carefully closed the doors and then gazed at his "best man."

"Three American engineers, six firemen and machinists, two Russian hunters, two river pilots and myself, with two cooks, make up the crew!" said Petroff. The boat is already provisioned, coaled and ready for her run to Habaroffka."

Ivan Petroff's sturdy frame, his clear blue eyes and straw-colored hair, his hearty voice and calm demeanor marked him as of the better class of Russian sea-dogs.

"Who placed you in charge?" said Rezoff, using the familiar form of the ordinary Baltic Russian patois.

The Consul Dimitri Gorlitz, Barin," answered the sailor. "I have already thoroughly tried the boat. She is a wonder! My men are reliable, and I have passports for the whole crew! So we are now clear of all formalities and provisioned for a fortnight!"

"How can you handle these Americans?" dubiously said the secretly excited Rezoff.

"I was five years sailing to Alaska for the Fur Company, and I have learned English thoroughly! My American wife waits for me at San Francisco!"

"Good!" cried Rezoff.

"And so we are ready to start when I can get the police permits!"

"All arranged!" cheerily cried Petroff.

"The full River permit was sent to me here from Baron Knorp at Habaroffka, to be delivered to you on your arrival. It is in your name, and the two river pilots know every town as far as Nertchinsk!"

"Then we could run on past Habaroffka if we choose?" said Rezoff.

"Certainly! We can get wood fuel at twenty landings between here and there! Coal at all the towns on both sides of the river, both Russian and Chinese, some forty in all! Will Your Excellency land?"

"No!" gravely said Rezoff, watching the vanishing spars of the "Sibir."

"Move her first slowly over to the other side of the river, and then, set your course steadily up stream at her three-quarter gait."

The light clang of the gongs sounded as the "Water Witch" glided, with no apparent motion, away from her moorings, and, swinging out into the stream, noiselessly sped up past the sleepy town, with the continued thrust of her double-cased propellers.

Rezoff sat silently in the cabin, as the "Water Devil's" speed increased, and the sailing master quietly entered, saying: "Fifteen miles now against the current, with ease, only a jogging speed."

The first bend, and the huge, lonely forests now hid the town from their view.

"Petroff!" said the merchant, as he watched the steward deftly arranging all his belongings. "I am only 'Serge Alexandrovitch' to you! No titles, no ceremony! I am a man of few words! I will handle the whole crew through you, and I wish you always near me! You will share my cabin."

The little snuggery was a marvel of compactness.

Four bunks, the lower arranged to use as desks, if needed, an extension table, repeating arms in racks—every adjunct for use and comfort.

"When will we reach the capital, Habaroffka?" asked Rezoff.

"Three days run!" curtly answered Petroff.

"Pass it, then, in the night, without stopping! Fill up with wood as needed! Keep all your coal ballast for emergencies! Take full charge! No one, of any class, is to board the boat! And no talk—no chatter! I will set the man at once ashore who talks!"

When the first river police-boat passed, Rezoff, seated smoking at the hooded stern, noted with surprise the Russian merchant flag and the boat's number quickly hoisted on his own boat.

"Consul Levassoff telegraphed the boat's registered number 'Eighty-five,' from Nagasaki," reported Petroff. "All that we have to do now, is simply to show our number! It has been already telegraphed to every

river station! You will find it, also, on the boat's sea letter. Consul Gorlitz sent all these data on to Levassoff at Nagasaki."

"You know him?" said Rezoff.

"Very well! I have transhipped several cargoes of raw sealskins through him at Nagasaki."

Throwing himself down to sleep, the excited Allan Law dreamed of a far-away face until the touch of the steward's finger roused him to an excellent dinner.

"To-morrow I will deliver to you all the accounts and inventories, the funds on hand, and read you my full orders from Consul Gorlitz, who alone in San Francisco could make provision for this long voyage! I think that we need nothing only occasional fresh supplies; and we are well armed, too!"

"Twenty stand of seven-shooting Hotchkiss rifles, ten thousand rounds of ammunition, five fowling pieces, with five thousand cartridges, and twenty revolvers, with five hundred rounds each! We can trade these off for anything, where money in any form is useless! There are some wild predatory tribes on the upper river."

"I will go over all, Captain!" said Rezoff, "and then leave all the details to you! I have my private notes to make, and shall be sparing of my time!"

By the next evening, three hundred miles of the primeval wilderness had glided by. The men all knew the alert, resolute face of their merchant chief, and even the Americans decided that "the boss was a man to tie to!"

Little did they realize Allan Law's secret inspection of every detail of the wonderful equipment of the fastest boat ever seen in the Orient.

Not a plan was wanting for the ultimate use of every inch of space, every pound of steam, every element of speed and stability in every weather. The discipline of the men—the silence and order—resembled a man-o'-war.

And so, greatly reassured, Allan Law gave over the direction of the voyage to the capable Petroff, whose stout heart bounded at the hope of the reward offered

him at San Francisco by Gorlitz—" when the crew should return!"

Rezoff easily finished his examination of the papers, and marveled at the foresight of the arrangements!

" I worked three months at San Francisco on all these details," said Petroff, " with Consul Gorlitz, and I am glad that you are so well pleased!"

They went over the whole boat together, and the taciturn Petroff soon recognized a master hand in his " merchant chief."

But, with true Russian stolidity and devotion, he merely sealed his lips.

" She is a wonder!" exclaimed Rezoff. " And her name?" said Petroff. " Let it be ' Eighty-Five,' as on the papers!" remarked the merchant. " I hope the year will bring us luck!" " God grant it!" cried Petroff, who was cheered by his new master's daily devotions at the sacred icon which with the two Imperial faces, looked down on them.

"No one bothered you at Nicolaievsk?" asked Rezoff.

" Orders have been sent all along the river to give us all possible aid, comfort and freedom from official restraint!" answered Petroff.

And the hours sped away, as the powerful boat glided, seemingly without effort, on past the unvarying mournfulness of the lonely shores!

Save a few picket-posts, a score of little penal settlements, a dozen fishing villages of the Giliaks, the great stream rushed in silence on to the ocean, its waters only wakened by the scream of the cormorant or the howls of wild beasts at night.

" In a hundred years," mused Rezoff, " cities yet to be born will shine upon these banks."

" Wealth, power, the greed of gold, woman's smiles, man's schemes, official intrigues, will bring the fevered modern life to this unravished Eastern treasure house. It is the onward march of Russia which will yet people these shores with the joys and sorrows of human existence!"

With all his books, papers and charts arranged, Allan Law walked the decks in a quiet contentment.

"There is not a scrap of paper, not an object, not Russian; not even a French novel, and so, I am impregnable in my disguise!"

"But one duty remains, to read my sealed orders *after passing Habaroffka*, and then, burn them!"

"Then, my fate, my reward, the happenings of a ten thousand-mile trip and its return are locked in the bosom of the future! All that I can do is to die for her, if need be, with sealed lips! My reward can wait!"

He kissed the signet ring which the Princess had given him.

"In Agar's name!" he repeated, "I will ask nothing! But, I can wait for her to speak—if she has a heart!"

Before they neared the capital of Eastern Siberia, Rezoff was familiar with the sad-eyed convicts clad in gray, with a black number on each man's breast, who piled the wood at the little landings where a red and white flag called to the passing boats.

A score of slow stern-wheeler steamboats had been passed, shuffling wheezily down the stream; their passengers frantically waving to the smokeless "devil boat," painted a dull gray, a color which faded into the fog, the sky and the river, and there was neither smoke nor noise to announce the passing of the eighty-five foot "Water Witch."

Rezoff keenly watched Petroff liberally giving silver roubles and a pound of tobacco to each convict, after wooding up, and noted the river pilots and the two hunters in long converse with these sad-eyed human wrecks.

"Poor fellows!" sighed Petroff. "Some of them are men of education, even nobles, and all of them the victims of misfortune! It is not the iron hand of the Czar, it is Fate which has sent them here! God help them!"

Cheerful and yet lonely, ever on the watch, to avoid betraying himself, Allan Law listened, with a hungry heart, to the songs of the American crew, the honest old English rolling out of their lips with a western snap, far different from the nasal Yankee tone.

"I must keep away from them," he mused. "It is a terrible temptation, and but for my flowing Russian beard they could easily see that I understand them!"

Long years before, Allan Law had learned to play his social part in Russian life, to wait, watch, dissimulate and hide even the lightest emotion.

But a fierce fire now burned in his bosom, as in the soft July evening the breezes fanned his brow when the outskirts of Habaroffka were discerned on the right bank! "If I should be stopped and searched here," he thought, "I might innocently betray Esmè, and so lose both life and honor!"

And thus he skirted the farthest shore in the starlit night, where the forest incense perfumed the balmy air.

The inexpressible sweetness of a Siberian summer was lingering upon the Amoor, as the "merchant Rezoff" watched the straggling lights of a town a mile long!

He could see the cupola of the Greek chapels, the vague outlines of works, barracks and docks, and the clang of bells sounded over the three-quarters of a mile of rushing waters.

All the lights of the boat were extinguished, save the headlight and the two sidelights, as the "Water Witch" left the capital city astern.

"What's that?" demanded Rezoff, as Captain Petroff opened the cabin door.

A heavy gun boomed out, echoing across the water!

"The nine o'clock gun!" sadly said Petroff. "All convicts and 'illegal' men and women are forced to be in their homes at this gun fire! Full speed, sir, now?"

"Yes!" cried Rezoff, his heart beating wildly as he sat down in his shaded cabin to read the sealed orders of the woman now wasting her proud heart away on the Neva.

It was midnight, and Petroff was on his usual nightly watch, which he divided with the chief engineer, before Allan Law, having burned the last document, threw the ashes overboard to prevent the possible curiosity of the steward.

Standing, a grimly silent figure, by the boat's waist,

he heard one of the American engineers grumble to his mate: "We have passed this town, the largest on the river, without stopping, Tom! We will meet strange companions, and earn our double wages, before the voyage is over! What is it, anyway; some sneaking job?"

The sneering English words cut Allan Law like a knife, and he was springing angrily forward when his secret trust recalled him.

"I must be silent and suffer this; anything for her sake! I have been molded 'as wax in her hands' to a strange destiny! I am only Rezoff, the merchant of Kharkov!"

And yet, sleep came not to his eyes that night, though the secret purposes of the Princess Esmè Chilkoff seemed not so desperate; in fact, they looked to be devoid of all nefariousness!

"That a vessel, owned by the rightful persons, should make a continuous voyage from Nicolaievsk to the town of Nertchinsk, and return, to save a valuable franchise of immense value!

"Leave all the official logbook and verifications to Captain Ivan Petroff, who has been secretly instructed!"

"You are to maintain discipline, to verify the voyage, and to be a witness later, outside of Russia. If needed, the only responsible witness of the voyage of this steamer!"

"Beyond checking your river maps and keeping your own diary of days, dates and places, you have no further duties until you return to Nicolaievsk, where telegrams, letters and orders will reach you through the agency of Baron Knorp, the sub-Governor of Pacific Siberia.

"You are to avoid this friendly official, whose post would be forfeited if his secret aid were suspected."

"The ownership of the boat, in your name, is legally established, and Captain Petroff will do some trading for ermines, sables and black and silver fox skins, perhaps even gold dust, which will give a commercial color to the trip!

"And hunting and a tourist's usual devices will ex-

plain your presence! And to all police investigation, you are to reply—nothing, to the last!"

"Easily said, not so easily done!" mused Allan Law. "When we have passed the twenty villages between here and Blagoveschensk, I will take a hand at hunting and native trade, if only to satisfy these curious Americans that I am merely looking for profit, now or in future."

"Safe now!" cheerily mused Rezoff, on the next day. "The whole detail of the sealed order is safe in my memory, and no one shall wrench Esmè Chilkoff's name from my lips! For I can prove to her, thank God! that even under a Russian name, an Englishman can keep his faith!"

But one injunction of the strange Circassian girl excited Rezoff's suspicions! "You are to send no reports or cablegrams until you return to Nicolaievsk! There—your last orders will reach you! Avoid all the officials! Captain Petroff has funds from Gorlitz to handle all the river authorities, and he will send any needful telegrams! He is well and long known to the whole police of the river, as he took one of the first American-built steamers over the whole course that you follow."

"Why should I fear to face these men?" mused Allan Law.

"I am now bronzed and travel-tanned enough to deceive even my own father, if he lived!

"But, she shall have her way! Petroff evidently has no dream of my identity! There is nothing now to incriminate me but my memory of Esmè's bewitching face! A woman to die for!"

He mused long and sadly, said, "Yes, one fated to break hearts lightly, and then, doomed, perhaps, to break her own!"

It was a weird voyage, this long sweep of the "Eighty-Five!"

While Rezoff critically examined the magnificent boat, he secretly watched each member of the sixteen strange companions of his mysterious voyage.

Ivan Petroff was now busied in arranging in trays an assortment of trading goods.

"To-morrow we pass the mouth of the Sungari, and the whole left bank as far as Ust Strelka is Chinese! They rule as far as the middle thread, and in case of any annoyance by the Russians we can hug that shore!"

"But from Habaroffka to the sea both the banks are Russian! Down stream, with forced draught and our oil-soaked coal fuel, I could run that in two days!"

"Once out of the Gulf of Tartary, I would make Japanese soil at Cape Soya, Yezo, in two more days!"

Brooding secretly, Rezoff began to divine that Petroff had some secret orders of his own! "You got the crew together at San Francisco?" said the merchant.

"Yes! Under the orders of Dimitri Gorlitz! I picked all the men, save the two river pilots and the two hunters!

"Gorlitz selected those! We all came over on Freeman, Smith & Company's annual ship, which carries all the heaviest goods of the Government to Nicolaievsk, as well as the supplies for their own stores!

"So the 'Water Witch' was brought on the deck of a three thousand ton clipper, her engines and boilers all taken out of her! I rely on the two pilots to aid me in my trade with the Chinese from beyond the Great Wall, and the two hunters will give you superb sport!

"Unless you order differently, I do not intend to stop on the left bank at all, going up or down! Our wood can be all got anywhere in trade, and coal, later, at the great Chinese settlement opposite Habaroffka for the run to Nicolaievsk! Should I have to take the boat over to Japan, after you are done, her water ballast can be replaced with oil, and that and forty tons of coal will run us a thousand miles!"

"And, this hunting?" carelessly said Rezoff.

"Exciting, but dangerous! Elk, tiger, bear, the glutton, lynx, wolf and wild boar!

"At each place, one hunter will get a squad of friendly Chinese to go out with you, and I expect to clear a hundred thousand roubles in sable, ermine, fine marten and fox skins, as well as gold dust, ginseng and silks!

"The little launch will be an ideal boat for you! It can tow the hunters and their escort in a barge! I expect to earn the whole expenses of the trip on this trade!"

"And this magnificent boat?"

"Ah!" said Petroff, "the Russians here are building splendid works at Nicolaievsk and Vladivostock! You know, in twenty-five years, we will have all Mongolia, Manchuria, Kirin and Corea; in fact, all China, as far as the Alashan Mountains and the head of the Yellow Sea!"

"Either Baron Knorp or Admiral Lemacheffsky would gladly buy the boat as a model, and so pay off all her inventory. One hundred thousand gold dollars!"

"There is no such boat in the world! This one can run in four feet of water, or go steadily in an open seaway! She is a wonder!"

The strange sights of the Chinese shores were unrolling themselves, while Serge Rezoff gazed at the unbroken sameness of the forests on the northern bank, the broken villages, the squalid settlements.

"What are these?" he asked of Petroff.

"Detached settlements of Polish and Russian exconvicts, refugees and simply deported men! There are nobles and women of princely blood forgotten here by the world!"

"Poor fellows! Our hunters and river pilots know them all, the old timers, and do many favors for them!"

Rezoff had noted about a hundred nondescript craft on the thousand miles traversed, mostly patched up tugs or old stern-wheelers, dragging barges laden with the richest goods.

"We could run away from anything in the Orient!" laughed Petroff.

The stolid Captain simply saluted when Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff called him into the cabin and delivered to him a transfer "in trust for the owners of the 'Eighty-Five' and her whole belongings.

"Something might happen to me," he gloomily said, "and I wish you to have the legal power to conclude

a sale of the boat, subject to the ratification of Dimitri Gorlitz, the Russian Consul at San Francisco!"

"I can have this stamped at Blagoveschensk and legally registered," said Petroff. "I will go over there with all the boat's papers. My cousin is the Starost there, under the Commander, who knew my father well, Captain Petroff, of the Russian Navy."

"Very good!" cried Rezoff. "Call all your crew aft!"

And then, with Petroff as interpreter, Rezoff announced the authority of Petroff and his new powers as sole agent! To his delight, the merchant found the second engineer, an American who served at Mülhausen, to be a perfect German scholar, and so, he was now at home with the American contingent, Luke Osborn being a good interpreter.

For a day, Allan Law wandered through the wild Manchurian settlement, at Aigun, while Petroff arranged with the fur-cloaked mandarins for their secret influence in the trading harvest of the fifteen hundred miles to Ust Strelka and Nertchinsk.

Keenly watching, the Englishman was astounded at Petroff's influence over all the leading Manchurians.

And, escorted by the two half-wild hunters, Rezoff explored fifty miles of the Chinese interior.

The engineers were keying up the beautiful machinery for the run against the wild currents of the upper stream.

It was a frontier paradise.

Taking the launch, the hunters brought in boat loads of pheasants, water fowl, red deer, and all the spoil of the teeming forests.

Secretly on guard, while near official civilization, Rezoff carefully examined the powerful steamer.

With its double bottom, bilge-keels, steel stern caged hood to protect the cased four-foot wheels, the ninety-foot boat was a marine jewel! Drift-wood nettings, electric lights and search signals, the telescopic smoke-stack, the smoke-consuming devices, the stern steam cradle to lift and launch the motor tender-boat, no refinement of the art was lacking.

Quadruple compounded engines, with two boilers,

arranged for wood, coal or oil fuel, the ballast tanks, air-tight compartments and marvelous arrangements astounded even the Royal Club yachtsman.

Said Petroff, laughing, "When we have our stores, fuel, water ballast, oil supply and cargo in shape, there is not an inch left to spare!

"Invisible at a mile in the slightest haze, silently working, we can tow a hundred foot barge at the rate of fifteen miles an hour!

"On my way up, I will warn all the Manchurian traders, and when we return to Blagoveschensk, the barge I will bring from Ust Strelka will be half full!

When we reach the last settlement, opposite Habaroffka, I will have it filled with a fortune, and these goods will be turned over to Freeman, Smith & Company, at Nicolaievsk, when we reach the mouth of the Amoor!"

"By cable from there, the credit can be transferred to Dimitri Gorlitz at San Francisco, and funds realized to take us back there!"

"The sale of the boat!" dubiously said Rezoff. "I wish Danieloff to take me back to Nagasaki, not later than September fifteenth!"

"Easy enough, Serge Alexandrovitch!" said Petroff.

"Gorlitz will cable to the two Governors. An agent of the Crown can then examine the boat, and he can receive the funds from the Russian Minister at Washington, on our delivery of all these papers and the set of working drawings of this "Water Devil."

"Then, you see, they can make twenty of them here, if this boat reaches Nertchinsk, and, so can command the river in any condition. They will each carry a company of troops and two machine guns."

"Half sized vessels on this model can go six hundred miles into many of the Chinese affluents of this unconquered stream."

"I fancy, mused Rezoff, "that my friend Ivan Petroff is also doing a bit of masquerading."

"And so, I will guard my secret! Let him guard his own! He shall pull my chestnuts out of the fire! He shall appear as the one Russian responsible agent!"

And then, towing a barge with a score of eager Chinese secret agents, the " Water Devil " swept on into the upper reaches of the great bend.

We are not really safe from official meddlers till we pass Komarsk and Blagoveschensk! " said Petroff. " The river is filling up with queer characters.

"In past times I have made a fortune for my owners, in one trip as far as Komarsk, but, we will skim the cream, now, between there and Nertchinsk! "

The July days were at an end when Rezoff saw the greep spires and bell cupolas of Blagoveschensk fade away behind him.

" The same Russian town! Stereotyped—whether in Kherson, Poland, the Caucasus, Khiva, or the Baikal! Soldiers, priests, vodki and cigarettes, beggers, idle officers and their lady loves, lazy officials and the stubborn squalid poor! "

Such were Rezoff's reflections as they sped on past Komarsk, and the river began to assume wild and witching forms of newer beauty.

Landing every day among the wild Manchurians, Petroff was busy with his bargaining, while Allan Law forgot the need of concealment, save merely acting his part.

His splendid hunting battery was now in daily use, and, under the tutelage of the two wild hunters, he sped away in the little launch whenever the boat tied up for a trading parley.

There was the virgin forest and wild hunting adventure, action, and all the free life of the woods in every busy day now.

At night, he was busy reading the stories of the iron-hearted Russians who, for two hundred and sixty years, had been creeping into China's unguarded rear territories, Rezoff put away all thoughts of danger. He even forgot the alert Americans, and dismissed from his mind the moody jealousies evoked in the Major's mind by the sight of Esmè's ring.

" He, a man almost twenty years my senior, he is no possible lover! " sternly mused Allan Law. " It is the way of the world! I suppose the beautiful Circassian has used us both, and will calmly marry Colonel Prince

Sacha Menchikoff before my return. I wish I had remained in Petersburg and shot him!"

The voyage now became vastly exciting.

Weird scenes, wild rapids, castled walls, old Tartar ruins, met the eye on every hand.

Strange savage tribes, whose defiant mood brought the whole seventeen men under arms, ruled the dangerous shores.

The crew and engineers were now each instant on duty; the river pilots loudly calling from their perches, as rapids grew more numerous, and the hunters, rifle in hand, stood ready to pick off any hostile Tartar brave.

In this dangerous and difficult navigation, only daylight was safe for the onward movement, and beyond Kottoman, a smart night attack left a dozen dead Tartars as evidence of the terrific power of the Hotchkiss breech-loaders.

As the river greatly narrowed, Petroff was forced to land furtively at the upper Russian garrisons for supplies, police reports, and to carry on his active trading.

Some inner misgiving caused Rezoff to shut himself in his cabin on these enforced landings, and though a few vodki sodden officials, lost in wonder, passed a few minutes on the strange steamer, the "merchant of Kharkov" had not set foot upon the Russian shores of the Amoor.

In the minds of the hardy American crew, the conviction had grown up that "Rezoff" was some crafty millionaire connected with vast projects of trade, perhaps bold mining, or, great schemes which linked the millionaires of Europe with the greedy officials of Siberia and the "money men" of San Francisco.

"He's an out and outer!" cried Luke Osborn. "Any man who will stand and drop a charging tiger, at a dozen yards, has the real sand! He is some great man! That fellow's no common trader!"

Busied with his books at night, making his river notes by day, watching his picked up Manchurian attendant dress and prepare the skins of the chase, Allan Law found a positive relief in the frequent absence of

Petroff, both on the Russian and Chinese side of the river.

His eyes were opened to the vast resources of the Siberian and Manchurian regions, before he stood in the moonlight in the ruins of old Nertchinsk, by the huge granite tablet whose Mongol inscription told of the conquest of Kara-Katai by the undefeated Genghis Khan, the untaught rival of Cæsar, Napoleon, the slayer of six millions, the stern man whose long career showed neither human frailty nor military mistake.

Though the boat could easily have gone on two hundred miles farther to Chita. Allan Law was now tired of his long masquerade as "Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff."

Lying three miles below Nertchinsk, hidden in a bend of the Chinese side of the river, the "Eighty-Five" was readjusted for her downward trip, while Petroff, in a Mongol canoe, visited the growing city of Nertchinsk with his two river pilots, to make his due official reports.

The sealing of the transfer papers at Blagoveschensk, had left Rezoff free to simply point to Petroff, without a word, and safely carry his character of traveler, hunter and, perhaps, visiting capitalist.

He had picked up a few words of the jargon of his two hunting companions, the head cook and steward were orthodox Russians, the nine Americans made a "mess "of their own, and Petroff was busied day and night with his two river pilots.

By a chance conversation, slyly overheard of the Americans, Allan Law found that Petroff was buying, at half price, great quantities of gold dust from the scattered convicts on the Russian shore, and thus evading both the Government assay tax of ten per cent., and the export duty.

"Sly fellow! Feathering his own nest!" mused Allan Law, who had wondered in the two weeks of the upper river trip at the bold free masonry with which the lonely "illegal men" all signalled the boat only known as the "Eighty-Five."

"Thank God! My own hands are clean!" reflected Rezoff.

It was with shouts of triumph that the swift steamer turned her head down stream after a crucial setting up for her long homeward voyage.

Not a rock had been struck; not a rivet loosened; not a dent marred the symmetry of the "Water Witch."

And now, Allan Law well understood the reason of the flat bottom, with its false keel and bilge keels armed with doubled shoes of green heart elm.

Not even a drift wood stick could penetrate the steel mesh guards of the cased manganese bronze propellers, and the whole ship's company was gay when Ivan Petroff returned from his three day's sojourn at Nertchinsk, Rezoff having taken the active command.

"We are safely reported, by telegraph, to Dimitri Gorlitz at San Francisco," whispered Petroff. "He knows what to do in Europe! He will notify all! And, now for a ten days' descent to Nicolaievsk, after a seventeen days' full running time up. All my trading is arranged."

"We will only stop an hour at each wooding-up station, to toss the goods into the barge, for each station will send a man on with us to the Chinese settlement opposite Habaroffka, where I will settle in Sycee silver for the goods. I have no more trading articles left."

"Sly rascal! Never speaks of the smuggled gold!" mused Rezoff, watching the chattering Tartars in the light barge towed behind them, as the "Water Witch" swept down stream at the rate of twenty-five miles an hour.

The unbroken loneliness of the wild shores had long since palled on Allan Law's wearied eye.

Crags, pinnacles, glens, vast lonely forests, smiling islands, haunted jungles, all were of the same lonely beauty, and the great stream, clad in summer mists, dreaming with the flapping herons and diving cormoants alone waking the silence.

Not even a blast of the "Water Witch's" whistle had waked the echoes.

Only the wild eagle's scream as he fled away to the Khingan Mountains.

"Will you touch on the Russian side?" carelessly

asked Rezoff, as he sat in the moonlight, listening to the chorus of the American crew and the strains of the accordeons, which seem to be the household music of lonely Siberia, even the natives playing on them with a surpassing skill.

"Only at Habaroffka, to turn my bulky goods over to an agent of our Nicolaievsk American friend," gravely said Petroff. "From there, using our coal and oil fuel, replenished at the Chinese settlement, we can reach Nicolaievsk in four days, where we will receive orders, you and I."

Rezoff stared at his subordinate, who murmured: "The steamer will probably be sold there, and Danieloff will wait for us with the 'Sibir.' I have sent the necessary dispatches from Nertchinsk. I will probably take my crew home by Nagasaki, to San Francisco, unless they may care to remain, and easily get quintupled wages in setting up the duplicates of the wonderful boat."

Allan Law was dreaming of the woman who had sent him away on this mysterious quest, when his eyes suddenly rested on the figure of the river pilot on duty.

"Have you changed any of your men?" quickly said the "Kharkov merchant."

"None!" said the stolid Petroff, without turning his head.

"That pilot!" persisted Rezoff, gazing at the man whose figure was clean cut in the evening starlight.

"He may have cropped his beard, or bought a new sable head gear," carelessly answered Petroff. "They are a pair of river mates, and know every rock on the whole stream."

Satisfied, yet not convinced, Rezoff listened to the accents of the man's voice, in which a strain of refinement and a sharp air of command were mingled.

"I will not pry," mused Rezoff, "lest I discover the thrifty Petroff's gold speculations to my own undoing."

That night, as he lay in his bed, Rezoff heard some one whistling softly the peculiar airs, which recalled to him, his own self as Allan Law, the guest of the Princess Esmè Chilkoff, for, they were love songs chanted

by the wild minstrels who had soothed his evenings at the old feudal hold in Dariel.

And so, puzzled, he drifted into dreams which were shadow pictures.

From Khiva's burning plains to foggy London, from the Amoor to Petersburg, he wandered, and, once, in his wildest dreams, he awoke, fancying Wardlawe's clutch upon his throat. "You have stolen her from me!" the dream antagonist cried.

But the gray mists of morning recalled him to the lonely waste of waters gliding by, showing the princely domains of Muravieff, Putiatin, and Ignatieff.

It was Luke Osborn who dispelled Rezoff's lingering suspicions.

"We call them 'Jack and Jill,' these two pilots," remarked the German-bred engineer.

"This poor fellow has had a touch of the river fever, and had cropped his hair and shorn his beard. His mate does half his work now, and the poor fellow is anxious to get to a hospital at Nicolaievsk.

"But, once in the broad river, the boat will run itself; we have three mile's breadth to choose from!"

When Allan Law spoke to the suffering man, handing him a bottle of the best cognac, and some quinine tonics, the poor fellow muttered his thanks in the Siberian-Russian patois.

In his character of "Rezoff the merchant," the Englishman directed Petroff to give the broken down man all the rest he could.

Three weeks of exposure to frequent storms seemed to have wasted the pilot visibly.

"I'll take a spell at it myself!" cheerfully said Petroff, and so the sick man lingered out of sight, as a rule, hidden in the bunk of a friendly engineer.

Sweeping down with her falcon flight, the boat rapidly retraced its route, only delaying for wood to reach the next station, and to toss aboard the bales of priceless furs.

There were packages of brick tea, fit for the Emperor of Russia, and Rezoff learned by Luke Osborn's volunteered confidence of the growing hoard of gold.

"They all speculate here," admitted the American.

"I think that I will remain and try and mend my fortunes here!"

Under the guard of the armed Mongols in the trailing barge, the "Water Witch" safely passed the debatable land, and, on the tenth of August, glided triumphantly into the harbor opposite Habaroffka.

The barge was loaded to the gunwales, and there were forty Mongolian merchants waiting to receive Petroff's settlement in "chopped silver."

"Here I must stay three days!" respectfully repeated Captain Petroff, "and I shall make the final police report at the Russian capital! Do you intend to go into the Russian capital here? The Governor-General, Baron Knorp, is visiting his superior at Vladivostock, for, Admiral Lemacheffsky handles the reins of all Eastern Siberia! Count Ignatieff's brother is the western Governor at Irkutsk!"

An indefinable yearning for the society of his social equals seized upon Rezoff.

"Can we leave the boat together?" he demanded.

"Certainly!" said Petroff. "Markham, the American chief engineer, is a man of standing, and has been captain of one of the Alaska Company's trading steamers.

"Then, I will take a look over the city with you," said Rezoff. "For I am weary of myself!"

Four hours later he sat in a merry circle of Russian officers at the "Hotel du Czar," on the main street of Habaroffka, wondering at the Parisian glitter, the singing girls, and all the metropolitan splendors of a perfectly appointed service.

It was Captain Petroff who seemed to be the central figure of a dozen groups, as he opened champagne with a truly Russian hospitality.

"A sop to Cerberus!" the Englishman mused. "He wishes to get his gold dust out in safety."

Anxious to throw off all suspicion, the merchant of Kharkov seconded his artful subordinate.

Surrounded by men cut off for ten years from Russia and the polite world by their long service, Rezoff was soon drawn into the circle of good fellowship.

Stories of adventure, European gossip, the hunting records of the voyage—all these were cheerily bandied.

Before the dinner the hospitable Colonel Milanovitch, of the Kazan Regiment, insisted that Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff should join a two-days' tiger battue on the banks of the Muren, some fifty miles toward the gloomy spurs of the Kendeh-a-lin Mountains.

"We can leave at dark on my own steamer, and reach the forests before daybreak. There is a half regiment out there now deployed as beaters. We will be back in two days. You can try your Moscow rifles against our army guns!"

And then, Petroff's whispers prompted an acceptance.

"I'll send the launch back in an hour with our two hunters and your whole outfit! Then we will be ready to slip away on your return! I will attend to all the local official formalities!"

And so it was, that on this fateful evening Allan Law watched the darkened banks of the Muren glide by, while his five companions chattered of the Plevna campaign, their sweeter victories in Paris, or revived gay memories of that beloved European world so far away.

One quick suspicion of possible trouble was soon quieted in Petroff's mind!

"I have nothing with me but my passport and my river note-book, written in Russian.

"Not an entry beyond the distances, courses and topographic features!"

All that day and the next the wild excitement of a great tiger battue kept Allan Law's blood at fever heat.

Five great Siberian man-eaters lay on the damp moss of the forest when the six men gathered in the evening around the hunter's table.

One Manchurian killed, two soldiers desperately wounded told of the ferocity of these forest kings, one of the beasts measuring fourteen feet from tip to snout.

And so, it was merry in the green wood, while the soldiers sang the regimental songs for their officers

and Rezoff's two hunters were busy skinning the huge beast which he had slain in its last desperate rush.

"Molodetz! Bravest of the brave!" cried Colonel Milanovitch, as he pledged "Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff," in champagne drunk from soldiers' tin cups.

"To our next happy meeting on the Neva!" he cried.

One of the officers started up, as with the wild clatter of hoofs, a sotnia of Cossacks dashed up, a bearded captain riding in front with his sword drawn!

Rezoff gazed at the reeking horses with curiosity, while the officer drew a folded paper and a sealed letter from his bosom.

"Whence come you, Pashkof?" cried a friend.

"From the Post Station No. 3!" severely said his friend. "I am sent on duty to the Colonel! Excuse me!"

He waived away the offered wine. The startled soldiers gazed in stupid wonder!

A strange silence fell on the merry party as Colonel Milanovitch slowly approached Allan Law.

Speaking in a broken voice, while the corded veins in his temples swelled with passion, he said: "My God! It is horrible, this! *My guest, he who eats my bread and salt!*"

And then he pointed sternly to Rezoff, who had sprung to his feet, drawing his revolver.

"Take him!" the Colonel cried, and as two Cossacks seized the disguised Englishman, a score of others disarmed the two brave hunters from the "Water Witch," who had leaped, knife in hand, to their beloved master's rescue.

"Stay!" cried Milanovitch, in a thundering voice. "No violence! He came as a gentleman and, he goes as a gentleman! Captain, you say you have a khibitka on the other bank of the river! We will all attend our guest there as a friend! How did you cross your troop?"

"Your steamer ferried my command over, Colonel!" gravely answered the Cossack Captain.

"Trapped!" gasped Allan Law, as he defiantly gathered up his belongings.

"In the name of the Czar!" solemnly said the Captain, bidding his followers transport all of Rezoff's belongings.

"Stay but a moment!" slowly said the disarmed prisoner, who had submitted to a respectful but effective search.

"These innocent men! My poor followers! As innocent as I am of all wrong!"

"They are to be returned to Habaroffka!" sadly said Colonel Milanovitch.

"They are free to depart as well as the party under Captain Ivan Petroff and his boat without either a hindrance or search!"

"Can I send a message of any kind?" defiantly said the prisoner.

"Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff!" cried the sorrowing Colonel, opening his arms and embracing him, "you are to go before the Admiral at Vladivostock forthwith! I can transmit no message! You are now deprived of all civil rights!

"But I will send my own adjutant with you to wait on you as a gentleman! See that you utter no imprudent word! It will surely be used against you!"

Leaving the excited camp, the five officers and the two hunters crossed the river in the growing darkness.

There stood on the bank, a troika in readiness.

At a signal from the Colonel a young officer who had caught up his cloak, brandy flask and a box of cigars—entered the carriage, armed with his sword and pistols.

A platoon will remain and bring on all the prisoner's effects!" said the Cossack Captain, who hung his head for very shame.

Not an exclamation, save the Russian of his youthful nurture, had escaped Rezoff.

Colonel Milanovitch whispered to the agitated prisoner: "Valerianoff and yourself can safely converse in French. These wild devils do not speak a single word!"

And then, raising his voice, he solemnly cried, in Russian: "I send my regimental adjutant to take care of my friend, who is to have every attention and

comfort in the six days' march! And as my guest, he must be put to no expense, no trouble! And my adjutant will soon apologize for the arrest of one who has broken my bread and eaten my salt at our very table! May God go with you, Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff!"

Tears streamed from the old man's face as he embraced the shaken prisoner.

"And my men are really free to depart?" Allan Law murmured, touched to the heart.

"The telegraphed order says that they are free to leave Siberia without even an examination!" said the Colonel.

Rezoff bowed his head in despair as the three officers made their heartfelt farewell.

"You may in my presence say adieu to your hunters!" sadly cried the Colonel, "but, no written message can be sent!"

"Good-by, my children! Be true and loyal!" said Allan Law as the frightened hunters fell at his feet kissing his hands.

The driver of the troika was crying "Brr! Brr!" to his chafing steeds.

"This is some damnable mistake, Serge Alexandrovitch!" groaned the Colonel.

"Remember, Lieutenant Valerianoff can speak to you all that he cares to, in French or Russian! He will stay with you to the last and report to me by telegraph, and we wait for you, with your place at our mess! I will see your boat started down the river in safety! As for you, keep silence! A chance word may lead to your death! Talk only of commonplaces! That, too, in French! But not a word of your case! Walls have ears, even in Siberia! And every gentleman in Habaroffka will plead with Knorp and Lemacheffsky for you!"

"Of what am I accused?" defiantly cried Allan Law.

The Colonel embraced him a last time. "Go with God! Drive on! I dare not answer!" he cried in an agonized voice.

The maddened horses sprang forward, the ghostly Cossacks glided along like wolves, and Allan Law's

head fell back against the cushions as they dashed out into the night.

"Six days post, night and day, down the Muren, the Sungachi and over Lake Hanka's shores to the Gate of the East—the Golden Horn!" whispered Valerianoff. "Leave all to me! Our regiment will work for you! Keep silence! I will attend to all!"

A sudden suspicion seized upon the entrapped Englishman. "The fatal curse of gold! Ivan Petroff has betrayed me with a false accusation! He led me into this trap! He has stolen the steamer! He can sell it and give a title! And, this Admiral has the power of life and death!"

A bitter resentment surged through the young man's heart. "They would not dare! An Englishman! Prison, chains, perhaps death! A single cablegram to Ignatieff, to the Princess Esmè, would free me!" he cried. "My God! I have tied my hands! I have sworn to keep silence, even bound this Yankee meddler to an eternal secrecy!

"The Circassian Circe! She shall learn some day that I died silently, true to the last! Am I to be the victim of some damned conspiracy? If they discover my nationality I am a dead man!

"No! It is all clear!

"Ivan Petroff is the crafty thief! He has doomed me to an unknown death!

"'Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff' I came here, and as 'the Kharkov merchant' I will die! She shall not be ruined by my cowardice!"

But in the lonely hours, despite the cheery chivalry of Valerianoff, Allan Law saw the toils closing around him.

On the evening of the sixth day the worn travelers halted before the naval prison at Vladivostock.

It was the fifteenth of August, and the setting sun shone on the magnificent Golden Horn land locked with the green hills fencing off the ocean!

A dozen proud Russian warships lay at anchor before the straggling city! The bay was alive with pleasure craft, merry crowds thronged the streets of

the polyglot town, stretching along two miles on the north side of the bay.

Great storehouses, docks, warehouses, splendid shops, and even superb mansions were visible, where forty thousand cosmopolitan people swarmed around the shores!

A beautiful park surrounded the Admiral's white walled palace. There were glittering officers, laughing ladies, listening to the sweet music of the fine naval band.

On the steps of the Marine Club, gay officers waved their hands to Valerianoff; the cafés and hotels were humming with the life of a fête day, and columns of gray-clad troops wound homeward to the huge scattered barracks from the evening parade.

As they halted, having passed the Officers' Club and the Casino, at a gloomy quadrangular stone hall with grated windows below, a guard turned out, a grim Major sprang forward as the Cossack Captain saluted.

"To the last I will stand by you!" cried Valerianoff as the Major hurriedly cried: "Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff! Prisoner without recourse! Let him be confined, under the eyes of two sentinels, in the safest comfortable cell till brought before the Admiral!

"Give him anything that he wishes, save writing materials or books! On your life be his safety! See that he does not kill himself! I will visit him myself, three times daily!

A sergeant grasped Allan Law's arm, the iron doors clanged, and five minutes later the young Englishman threw himself on the couch in his room.

"Death at my own hands—not theirs!" he muttered.

And yet two Cossack sentinels with drawn sabers were standing in diagonal corners of the room.

"Perhaps I can bully them into killing me!" mused the despairing man.

"And this is the end? Let it come!"

From his grated window he could see the flag of

Japan flying on the "Hiogo Maru," lying there with her steam up.

Then a mad rage possessed him. "That damned Yankee Wardlawe! He loves this Circassian girl! Is this his doing?"

He dropped back at a growl from his guards. "If I get out of here I will take his life and spoil that little game! And, Esmè?

"No!" he fondly cried. "She could not betray me! It is against the very soul of womanhood! To tie my tongue, to seal my lips and then sell me like Judas! No Tcherkess girl could do that! Never!"

When the night grew slowly to the dawn of his first prison day, afar, off in Russia, in the lovely groves of "Mon Plaisir," the Princess Chilkoff, white faced read a telegram from Baron Sternberg.

"One week, one week since Allan Law left Habaroffka alone! And no news for me, no reports! It may be another week yet of living anguish!

"Allah, be merciful! If I have sent this man to a silent sacrifice—if aught befall him—I will die by my own hand! For he has kept the faith!

"And now his awful, silent, lonely ordeal comes! They may arrest him! Will he understand? And, can I protect him?"

All that night the Circassian girl, in her loneliness, sobbed in her troubled sleep. "Save him, Ayesha! Save him, great mother, in Agar's name!"

And the anguish of her wasted face now struck the Countess Natalie to the heart.

To her husband she said despairingly: "It is not death I fear for Esmè! It is the saddest of all deaths—death in life—a hopeless insanity!"

Her husband muttered: "Would to God the Czar would mercifully send her back to her own beloved mountains! The girl is slowly going mad!"

BOOK III.

HELD FOR THE OWNERS.

CHAPTER IX.

A RECORD RUN.

On the morning of the mysterious seizure of the merchant of Kharkov, Captain Ivan Petroff paced the strand of the Chinese town opposite Habaroffka, waiting with impatience the return of Rezoff and his two guards.

Beside him walked the resident agent of the one great American house which has business relations making a secret chain from San Francisco to Moscow, along the Amoor and by Irkutsk.

The furs and spoils of the chase had all been turned over to the agent's warehouse on this bank, free from the Czar's inspectors, and thus were safe under the treaty of navigation.

Petroff's mind was troubled about his hidden hoard of purchased gold.

"If anything should happen," he timorously thought, "all my profits would be wiped out, and the San Francisco people would believe that I had stolen the gold!"

But the crew of the "Water Witch" were all ready, only waiting the signal to cast off.

"Something wrong?" anxiously cried the American agent.

"See that police launch coming! Though the

Chinese own this shore, the first aggressive act of the Russians will be some day to land a force behind this nameless city on this low triangle, slaughter the poor devils, driving them into the Amoor and Sungari and loot the fifteen millions of property hidden in these log huts!

"Look out for yourself, and be calm! I will go into your cabin, so as to have your last word! They dare not seize you here in Chinese waters! But there is trouble ahead! Keep your wits about you, Petroff!"

With a quick motion of his hand, Petroff gave a warning to the enfeebled river pilot, sitting, wrapped in furs, on the deck of the "Water Witch," basking in the August sun!

"All hands under arms!" yelled Petroff, in a ringing voice.

The river pilot disappeared like a flash.

There were but four men in the police steam launch, now but a couple of cable's lengths away.

One was a grimy engineer, one a Russian Major in full uniform, and the other two, were the hunters, wildly signaling trouble to their beloved chief, Ivan Petroff.

The sailing master stood alone at the bank, revolver in hand, as the launch neared him.

"Land here!" he cried; "do not board my boat! My men are armed!"

And it was indeed a formidable array—thirteen repeating Hotchkiss rifles, each loaded with seven cartridges in the magazine and one in the barrel.

The American clerk was vainly trying to open the cabin doors as the Russian Major leaped on the Chinese strand.

But within the darkened cabin a man was hastily throwing down the front of a false berth.

Underneath was a hidden receptacle for the easy hiding of a human being, with ventilators artfully disguised by ornamental work.

A brace of revolvers lay on the little couch within as a haggard wretch dropped the swinging panel which caught with four snap locks.

"Captain Ivan Petroff?" courteously cried the Major.

"The same!" answered the excited sailing master, dropping his revolver on its belt chain.

"An official letter from Colonel Milanovitch!" gravely said the official.

Petroff staggered back as he read it.

"This is a frightful mistake!" he faltered.

"Say nothing, my poor friend!" kindly said the official. "If I were you I would get out of the Amoor *as soon as possible!*"

Petroff's face had whitened in his sudden terror. The two hunters had leaped on board the steamer, which was moored at the banks, with a single gang-plank.

"Do not lose a moment!" said the Major. "Milanovitch is your friend! Now, he has sent me over here to inspect your crew. If you will let me muster them on your passports I will sign you a river permit in the name of Colonel Milanovitch, acting Governor of Habaroffka in Baron Knorp's absence!

"Then get out of the river as soon as you can! Some passing vessel may tow you over to Japan! If you linger you are lost!"

Petroff moved toward the gang-plank.

"Let me parade my crew!" he said. "You can see that no one enters or leaves the boat!"

As he stepped on the deck of the "Water Witch" he saw the heap of furs vacated by the missing river pilot.

"Quick! Quick!" he cried to Rezoff's Manchurian boy, the hunter picked up on the river.

"Put this all on, over your face, and keep silent!"

The frightened native obeyed, crouching in a corner.

Darting to the cabin, Petroff called the American agent.

"I forgot that I had locked it!" he cried, using his pass-key. "There, go in!"

Five minutes later—passports in hand—Petroff passed his men one by one past the Major.

"Three engineers, six firemen, two river hunters,

two cooks, two river pilots, myself!" he said. "And one missing—the merchant Rezoff!"

"He has his passport," gravely said the Major.

"All right!" he cried, "but, who is that man lying there?"

"The second river pilot!" calmly answered Petroff. "He has the fever! Do not go too near him!"

"Checked. List all correct! Sixteen in all!" said the Major, handing back the passports. "Here is your river permit, duly signed! You must take your own risks if you land! Go, in God's name! I am to escort you out in the river and follow you down below our jurisdiction! After that you belong to the Governor of Nicolaievsk! Get away at once!"

With a sigh of relief, Petroff called the Chief Engineer. "Full speed ahead down the river on my signal! Report when you are ready!"

A bottle of champagne hastily opened dismissed the Major to his boat in a good humor.

"Tell Colonel Milanovitch that I will repay him for this thoughtful privilege!"

And then, left alone, Petroff leaped to the side of the American clerk.

"Now, Anderson, for God's sake, get ashore! Telegraph your people at Nicolaievsk to send fifty tons of coal in sacks to the mouth of the Amoor for me! I will cruise up and down with the American flag as a signal!

"Also one hundred and ten gallon cases of coal oil! That will fill my water ballast bunkers! I will pump them out!

"Fifty tons more of sacked coal to Cape Soya on a seaworthy junk at the head of Yezo! I am going to try to get over to Otaru! I will send drafts to your agent at Hakodate! Get away and telegraph this! The coal for Cape Soya must leave at once on a fishing schooner or a junk! Act instantly!"

"All right!" gasped Anderson. "I'll get the dispatch away in half an hour!" he wrung his friend's hands, whispering: "Keep silence! Say nothing! Get out on the high seas! Any steam whaler will tow you over to Japan!"

Amid the wild yells of a hundred Mongolians, the swift "Water Witch" slowly steamed out into the thread of the current. Her signal number "Eighty-five" was now flying at the little bow masthead, and with the strenuous throb of her splendid engines she sped away like a startled antelope.

Only a vague halloo and a friendly cap-waving of the Major was the adieu of the Queen of the Amoor.

The strand at Habaroffka was black with sight-seers as Luke Osborn, at the levers, sent the "Water Witch" speeding past the river capital at thirty-two miles an hour.

The lithe steel frame of the beautiful boat quivered in the conscious tremor of a never-to-be-equaled record, while the bearded engineer laughed at the police launch, a mere crawling dot far behind them now.

But Petroff, in his cabin, eagerly listened to the tale of the two hunters.

"So then," he growled, "it was not the Colonel; it was no trap set for us here!

"Some damned outside meddler! Some sneaking spy! Some deadly revenge! If Baron Knorp does not return till I get out of the Amoor I am safe, for I think that I can run the lower batteries and the four forts at night! God send us a fog and I am then all right!"

Calling the steward, the new chief of the expedition sternly said: "I shall keep the cabins locked till I have packed all Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff's effects and sealed them! Let no one enter but yourself, and I will give you the key when I wish my meals served!"

The whole ship's company felt the presence of some impending disaster, but the undaunted spirit of the absent Rezoff still animated them all.

"Three-quarter speed!" ordered Petroff, as he called the three engineers in front of their engines. "I will give you two days to reach the mouth of the Amoor! Do not strain your engines! I wish to run the Nicolaievsk batteries at night!

"After that we will sneak over to the Saghalien shore and move steadily down along to Cape Soya.

"We have three weeks' cased provisions on board,

and our condenser gives us all the fresh water we need!"

"Fuel?" cried the three Americans in a breath. "I will provide that!" grimly said Petroff.

"Now, the Russian officials here have offered a hundred thousand dollars for this boat, her supplies and working plans. It may be cheaper," coldly said Petroff, "for them to confiscate her and so, steal her!

"But if you two men get me safe in Japanese waters, so I can protect her under their flag, there is five thousand dollars each for you three engineers and a thousand each for the six firemen! And, by Heaven, I'll make the Russians pay this extra expense!"

"The tip is then to run away from anything that chases us!" said the Chief Engineer, a shaggy-bearded giant.

"That's it, Markham!" cried Petroff, "and I will defend the boat! I have the Governor of Nicolaievsk's sea letter! That is legal and binding!

"But the fleet is under the sole orders of the Admiral at Vladivostock.

"They might take a fancy to take us in there and keep us prisoners for a month! They would make full working drawings of the boat and then, let us go!"

"Fools!" cried Markham. "I could throw away a few valves and connections, disjoint one or two secret parts, and they could work for ten years and never make a duplicated boat run!"

"True!" said Petroff, "but, they would ruin us! And now, discipline, coolness, steadiness, and one for all and all for one!

"It's home and a splendid reward that you men want! You can all come out here again with me! I have friends in power far above all this river aristocracy!"

Settling to her even gliding gait of twenty miles an hour, the "Water Witch" left the wooded shores behind, as if they were a swiftly unrolled panorama, and Ivan Petroff, locking himself in the cabin vacated by the wretched Rezoff, proceeded to secrete his stores of gold in openings contrived under the cabin floors.

It was much to the astonishment of the mystified

steward to notice the vastly increased appetite and peculiar habits of Ivan Petroff.

On the evening of the second day the curious servant, creeping to the cabin door, muttered: "I would have sworn there were two men talking in there! He eats for two now! Perhaps, he talks for two!"

In the bustle of the runaway departure from Habaroffka, no one had remarked the disappearance of the second river pilot.

And when one of the men questioned Petroff, the sailing master said: "The poor devil had gone up into the Chinese settlement to get some medicines for his fever, and so, I had to leave him! Bundle up all his furs and things and I will see them sent back up the river to him by and by!"

A moody silence settled down over the boat as the "Water Witch" approached the four heavy batteries at Nicolaievsk.

For eighty rifled cannon, carrying four to six miles, were here placed in battery on opposite sides, two forts on each bank, and the alert gunners could easily hit a barrel anchored in mid stream.

"There are six or eight swift torpedo boats down there!" growled Markham, "and the devils all carry Hotchkiss revolving cannon! A few rounds of their grape would leave us only a drifting hulk!"

Hugging the shadiest shore, the "Water Witch" glided along into a low fog bank, a few miles above Nicolaievsk as the sun went down on the third day!

"Only sixty miles more!" sighed the haggard Petroff. "Thank God for this thickening fog!"

Girded with his pistol belt, the sailing master called Markham to his side. "Have all ready for the utmost speed! They may have their torpedo boats out! For, alas! no one can trust a Russian, either under word, seal or bond! Even the Czar has a thousand ways of breaking forth and saving his official honor!"

"Count on me!" said Markham. "There will be some dead Russians before I wear Siberian chains! I've seen these poor convict devils up the river! I'm all ready!"

"Then I will steer the boat!" cried Petroff. "This

harbor and the river mouth is where I learned my trade in life!"

With all lights out, the furnace doors closed and in a complete silence, the "Water Witch" throbbed on past the town from whence the faint clangor of bells was borne over the misty water.

"There goes the nine o'clock gun!" muttered Petroff, half an hour later, as four muffled reports followed in alternation from the two banks.

At half speed in the dense fog, the boat glided silently on, Petroff steering by his compass course and letting the current swing the boat's head, in the gloom.

"One hour more and we are safe!" the tortured man sighed. "Oh, God! for the open sea!"

There was no word spoken until a half an hour later, when the churning of a vessel's screw near by roused the anxious Petroff.

Suddenly a snaky form loomed up, surging past the bow of the "Water Witch." There was a faint halloo.

"One of their damned torpedo boats!" yelled Petroff, as he signaled "Full speed, dead ahead!"

And then, with the recklessness of despair, the sailing master drove the swift steamer boldly down the swollen flood.

He was the first man, in the gray of the early morning, to see the low rolling headlands of the mouth of the Amoor, here three miles wide.

Standing moodily alone, Ivan Petroff swept with his glasses the gray mist line lifting slowly from the green-tossing billows.

"We have coal for a hundred and twenty miles only, sir!" said Markham, pulling at his shaggy forelock.

"And if a storm should come up, I think that you should run the boat back to Nicolaievsk, turn her in and surrender us, to be sent peaceably out of the country!"

Petroff closed his glass cases with a snap!

"Do you see that schooner to the southward, hove to, flying the American flag as a pilot signal in her waist halliards?"

"Aye, aye, Sir!" joyously cried the American.

"Run down to her at full speed! Don't spare a turn of the engines! There's your coal!"

And while the "Water Witch" leaped over the waves, firmly water ballasted and steadied with her bilge keels, the sailing master got out a fifty-fathom steel towing hawser with his spare gang and threw down the towing yoke.

"What in heaven's name are you going to do, Captain Petroff?" cried Markham.

"Tow that schooner forty miles across the strait to the bay on Saghalien, where the Japs used to heel their junks! And then, you'll see what I'll do!"

Four hours later six anxious men stood on guard with their loaded repeaters, while twenty Tchucktches quickly pitched the five hundred sacks of precious coal on board.

Two of the engineers, with a gang of a dozen of the schooner's laborers were busied in ripping open a hundred ten-gallon cases of coal oil.

The steam pumps in half an hour had sucked the water ballast compartments dry, and as the coal oil gurgled into the false bottom compartments, from four spouts, the coal heavers worked with a will.

"Five hundred dollars, in Sycee silver, if we finish all before dark!" cried Petroff, now the soul of every movement. He laughed grimly when the last empty oil case was tossed back on the schooner's deck.

"There you are, Markham!" cried Petroff, as he saw the schooner drift away seaward under a jib and foresail. "Now you have fuel for a thousand-mile run!

"Turn her loose, and we will keep under cover of the headlands! Give me twenty miles an hour until we pass Dui, but, strain nothing! We will pass Tyk to-morrow night, Dui the night after, and the morning of the third day should find us off Madka, on the west coast!"

"And then?" cried Markham.

"Lay me into any Japanese town and you've earned your money! I will run across La Perouse Straits to Cape Soya!

"There, we will replenish our fuel, and we can make Otaru easily, with no further stop!

"Once there, even the Czar cannot interfere with us! For, there is a telegraph and a Russian Consular agent! I will telegraph to the owners at San Francisco for orders and protection!"

"God! You should have been a General!" cried Markham. "And poor 'Rezoff,' our missing master?"

"Unless Admiral Lemacheffsky has some heart, some qualms of conscience, Rezoff will be executed forthwith if they are bold enough to trump up the requisite charges! I can see that they want this boat and her working drawings! They meant to have them, too! Mark you, if we are caught I will burn the drawings, and you can permanently disable the engines!

"But, if they try to take us in Japan or use force, I will blow her up! The thousand gallons of oil fuel will wreck her in a half an hour! They dare not touch me, the dogs!"

With every light extinguished, carrying not even a head lantern, the unwearied Petroff steered the boat all night, until past the three islands, in the Gulf of Tartary, opposite Alexandrovsk.

The rough and forbidding rock cliffs of Saghalien frowned down upon them from the port side as the "Water Witch" scurried lightly along.

"Heavens! What a sea boat!" cried Markham as the gray dawn stole on them and he came on for his watch.

In a few words Petroff gave the rugged American his directions.

"Let me sleep now!" he said. "I will lock up my cabin!

"Only in the last emergency rouse me, for I must sleep so as to guide you past Tyk! We saw the lights of three sailing vessels and two steamers last night! Hold her in hand, and let me rest!"

That night, at midnight, the swift steamer swept on past the cone of Tyk, whose gleaming beacon could be seen fifteen miles at sea.

All the long night, wrapped in his hair seal coat,

through drenching spray, Petroff guided the boat, which swept over the surges with the leap of a tiger.

"Nothing can defeat us now!" grimly said Petroff, "unless a storm should arise, for we dare not risk the open middle channel in a Japanese typhoon, and now the twentieth of August, to September fifth and eighth, they scourge the sea!

"Should that befall, we would have to run in and bide it, or turn turtle!

"She has not hold enough on the water for such a demonic wind!"

The steward that afternoon, bringing Petroff's dinner, paused aghast! "He is going mad; he talks to himself! For surely, there is a lively conversation going on, and there are two tones in his voice!"

With a frightened face, the simple fellow set down his tray and fled!

It was Spartan fare, for all shared alike now, but the waiter noted the empty champagne bottle.

"Ah! That kind of wine always gives a man several voices!" he sagely observed as he closed the door, hearing Petroff's key turn in the lock.

At four o'clock the next day Engineer Markham rushed to Petroff's door and vigorously assailed it.

They had stolen past Dui three hours before, where a circle of a dozen steamers lay at anchor, being clumsily coaled by barges, while the drifting fog half concealed their bulky forms. Not a trace of the fortifications could be seen, but the tolling of a fog bell sounded mournfully as the "Water Witch" swept on.

"What's wrong?" cried Petroff, his pistol in his hand.

"Smart corvette, three miles ahead, laying for us on our port bow, and making signals!" said the American.

"Are you fit for your premium run?" demanded Petroff.

"She is as clean as a clock!"

"Then," said Petroff, "you take the engines and, I will go to the wheel!

"I wish to creep near her at a quarter speed, so they will not force their steam, and then, at gunshot

range, dart off and leave them! She will be waiting if she thinks that we are surrendering! I can see it all! They have telegraphed down to Vladivostock and sent this boat over from there, thinking that we would have no fuel! I will fool with them till dark!"

An hour was passed as the "Water Witch" crept heavily along at five miles an hour, till the corvette, under a seven-knot speed, moved slowly out to meet the evidently surrendering vessel.

"I will go to the stern and steer her! Watch for my bells!" cried Petroff. "Let the men all lie down!"

The evening darkness was closing, and a vast fog bank blew slowly out from the land toward the corvette, now flying the blue and white war flag of Russia.

A window cautiously opened in Petroff's cabin and then an unknown, but an alert voice called off the signals. "Important orders! Lay to till we send a boat aboard!" said the hidden man.

The "Water Witch" swung easily toward the great fog bank, crawling along between the two.

The corvette stopped and, with leisurely care, lowered a couple of boats, as a tongue of the mist swept in between the two.

And then, the Chief Engineer leaped to the levers. and at her fullest racing speed the "Water Witch" drove into the fog bank, skimming through the oily waters at the rate of thirty miles an hour.

Leaping to the bridge, Petroff swung his hat, as Markham gave a rousing cheer, when a salvo of heavy shots pealed out.

"They are firing, in our old direction!" laughed Petroff, as he raced away at right angles to his last course.

"They will never see us again, and to-morrow at daybreak, we will be off Cape Soya!

"Go and sleep, Markham; I will watch to-night, for when we have coaled I must make Otaru before to-morrow night!"

"Coaled?" Are you crazy?" cried the Engineer.

"I telegraphed from Habaroffka to send fifty tons of sacked coal down there on a Japanese junk or a

sealing schooner! Then, Sir, you can see what you can do to put us in Otaru!"

"The whole crew shall have a week ashore, and at my expense! Whatever the town can produce is not good enough for them! French wine goes for all hands! It's a lively town of ten thousand! I have often visited it on trading cruises."

"This is beyond me!" muttered Markham. "He must have a fortune on board, in the gold dust!"

It was even so! Ivan Petroff recalled, as the "Water Witch" darted forward, the penalty of his being seized with the smuggled gold dust.

"Either the loss of the whole fortune, or else ten years in the salt mines of Nertchinsk for me. Oh! For the daybreak!"

An indefinable anxiety had spread itself among the men, and there was a wild scream of delight, when the Japanese emblem, the sun, rose red and fiery, from the leaden waters, and showed them the granite cliffs of Cape Soya.

"Hurrah! There she blows!" cried Luke Osborn.

"You have won the hundred dollars!" cried Petroff, as the steamer bore down toward a Japanese junk, boldly flying the American flag, and standing off and on, in the current racing between Yezo and Saghalien.

"Now, rouse all hands!" cried Petroff, in English, shouting in Russian his commands to the landsmen.

It was no easy matter for the two vessels to lie near each other in the swell, but, at last, a doubled hawser, at stem and stern, bound the junk and the "Water Witch."

Markham and Petroff guided the lashed boats along at the rate of ten miles an hour, while the sacked coal was quickly tossed aboard.

"Twenty miles already on our southward course!" cried Markham, when the steel hawsers were loosened, and the bare-legged Japanese howled in affright to see the "Water Witch" leap away like a greyhound on the chase.

"Hoist our signal 'Eighty-Five!'" cried Petroff. "And now pipe all hands to muster! There are the

two outlying islands! We are in Japanese waters now!"

And then, a stiff grog ration was followed by three cheers, when Petroff announced the shore leave!

"Only, do not fail me now!" the stern-faced Russian sailing master said.

His eyes grew red and haggard, as the steamer raced along the sculptured shore of beautiful Yezo.

And when the afternoon sun sank low, the fisher huts, the sea flung skiffs of the toilers of the sea, the gardens and clustering tea houses all told of the near approach of a city.

Gray temples and smiling fields, fragrant woods, lay before their eyes as the fleet steamer glided into the lovely curving harbor and tied up to a can buoy, but three cables' length from shore.

"Now, Markham!" cried Petroff, as he stood at the cabin door, with a bundle of papers in each hand, and signalled to a swift sampan. "On you, devolves the care of the boat till I return. Guard her but half an hour! You have won your money, and you shall have your coin at the Hakodate Bank, in three days.

"I only touch here for a telegraphic report.

"Let no one board the boat! Keep your hawser ready to cast off! Simply run out to sea, if annoyed! I will signal you from the beach, with raising and lowering the American flag, three times!"

"I will guard her with my life! All hands under arms!" cried Markham.

And, as Petroff paddled away, the curious steward gazing over the rail, muttered: "That man in the boat with the master looks like the sick pilot!"

Fifteen minutes later, the French keeper of the one little hotel stared at a customer in rags, who bade him go and detain the Japanese packet just starting for Hakodate.

Throwing him a five pound Bank of England note, the stranger said: "Fifty pounds for my passage, if they will wait an hour. Get me a dinner, and open your best wine! Look alive!"

"A beggar king with a prince's accent!" cried the

astounded tavern-keeper, as he scuttled down to the little packet, now all ready for her departure.

"The dispatches are all sent off!" cried Petroff, as he bustled in, while the river pilot was busily devouring a filet aux champignons.

"Burgundy!" muttered the ragged pilot in classic Russian. "This is a velvet heaven! Go, now; Petroff, to your duty! You will find me at the American Consulate at Hakodate. Bring your boat around there, and give your men their frolic there. For, I have touched Japanese soil! And, I am now as free as the birds of the air!"

"Stay, give me your belt and pistol! And remember that you do not even know me! You will find me another man!"

A mob of the curious followed the strangely liberal passenger, who, boarding the little packet, took the one cabin reserved for traveling aristocrats, and then, threw himself down to sleep.

At his door, watched the poor Manchurian hunter, whose master was lying within the stone walls of the naval prison at Vladivostock.

And no one saw this strange waif of fortune leave the boat at Hakodate, on the next night, when the little packet puffed into the harbor.

For, the Austrian Consul, in waiting there, with a closed carriage, whisked the stranger and his Manchurian servant away, with lightning speed.

The Gibraltar of northern Japan was sleeping in the moonlight when the "Water Witch" ran through the outer harbor and anchored in the beautiful inner basin.

No sooner had the beautiful boat anchored, than Captain Ivan Petroff, placing Markham in charge, jumped into a sampan, in which Rezoff's Manchurian hunter stood gesticulating with a letter in his hand.

"Remember!" cried Petroff. "My cabins are all locked and sealed! And, you will defend the boat by force till my return! But, fear not, they will not dare to use force! I will return before daybreak.

Sculled to the shore, Petroff drove to the Austrian Consulate, around which a dozen rickshaws and carriages had waited all night! The whole building was

brilliantly illuminated, and messengers ran hurrying to and fro!

Markham, grimly leaning on his Hotchkiss rifle, cheered his men with the seven days "shore leave," which was to be a terrestrial Paradise of creature comforts.

He had noted the English gunboat in the outer harbor, a couple of British tramp tea steamers, and to his infinite disgust, an ugly looking Russian dispatch boat, carrying six guns.

"Not a single Yankee war vessel!" he gloomily said.

"And what good would it do, with our river signal 'Eighty-Five' defiantly floating! The Muscovites are 'laying for us,' and we will have a hornet's nest around our ears by daybreak! But, evidently, Petroff has no fears. He has ordered the fires all left to die out, and no steam to be kept! Smart devil he is!"

Markham knew of Petroff's telegraphed dispatches from Otaru, placing himself under the protection of both the Russian and American consuls.

"I suppose that he will divide his smuggled gold with the Yankee consul!" grinned Markham, whose reveries were cut short by a twelve-oared boat from the Russian gunboat, making a cautious circuit around the "Water Witch."

But the hoarse hail of warning, the fourteen brandished rifles soon made the discreet enemy sheer off.

"There will be a 'song and dance' when the sun rises," confided Markham to his mates.

"What do we care?" cried Luke Osborn. "Here's where we get our five thousand dollars each, as engineers, and the firemen three thousand! I like this place!"

Freed from all care, the pipes were lit and the bottle circulated, as the merry crew confided in Petroff's craftiness.

"The man who could coal us twice at sea for a fifteen hundred mile runaway voyage, can surely bluff these sea lawyers!" growled Markham, sternly on guard.

When the sunrise showed them the town lying at

the foot of the huge mountain, the bare sandspit running three miles to the mainland, the magnificent double bay, with its flitting fisher boats, the men gazed at the wilderness of one story houses, the temples hid in the cliffs, the thousands of gleaming white tombs dotting the green slopes of the overhanging rock.

"There's a signal for some one!" cried Markham, when all hands were "roused out" to breakfast, the men worn by their anxious night guard.

A series of wild steam whistle blasts from the largest of the English tea tramps announced a hasty departure.

Just then, a shore boat dashed alongside flying the Austrian flag, and Ivan Petroff leaped on the deck.

"Clear away the steam launch, lower it, and get up steam at once!" cried Petroff to Markham. "I will need it ready every minute here, now! Send two men aft!"

And, as Markham followed his chief, he saw in the stern sheets of the Austrian boat, under white umbrellas, two men dressed in the height of fashion.

One of them gave orders in a clearly official tone. The other leaned back, and all that Markham could note was his ghastly face, smooth shaven, and his eyes gleaming as fiercely as an eagle's.

To his utter astonishment, beside these men, sat the Manchurian hunter in a neat fitting dark blue suit, wearing a turban made of a black sable skin which an Emperor might covet.

"Look alive!" cried Petroff, as the men handed over into the boat four cartridge boxes, whose weight was undeniable.

"I will follow you over to the steamer!" cried Petroff. "You must hold her for an hour! Here comes an official visit."

The Austrian boat was soon lost in the maze of smacks, schooners, junks, and sampans crowding the inner harbor, and then, Petroff, in a ringing voice, cried: "All hands under arms! To your posts!"

Markham stood, rifle in hand, at his chief's side, as a Russian naval boat swept alongside, filled with a dozen armed bluejackets and rowed by eight sailors.

An officer in full dress called out in Russian: "Board her!"

Then, Ivan Petroff, running up the American flag, under the flying signal, sternly cried in the same language:

"At your peril! The first man who boards, drops dead in his tracks!"

"May I speak to you?" politely cried the astonished Russian naval officer, lifting his cap.

"Yes," grimly answered Petroff. "Call a sampan alongside! Sheer off your boat, and I will come into the sampan and talk to you. Here, sir, I am under Japanese protection, which I now claim! If you violate it, it will cost you your rank and your men their lives. I have fourteen men armed with repeaters!"

"Assuredly, I mean no violence!" cried the young Russian, as he jumped alone into a boatman's skiff, and then, sent his armed boat three hundred yards away.

"Do you speak English?" cried Petroff.

"Certainly!" laughed the naval officer.

"Leave your gun and come in with me, then, Markham!" gravely said Petroff.

"Whom do you represent?" politely demanded Petroff, lifting his cap.

"The orders of Admiral Lemacheffsky, commanding the whole of East Siberia and our Asiatic fleet," murmured the Lieutenant.

"Pray examine these papers!" soberly said Petroff. "They are a permit for the river navigation and outward Amoor passport, duly sealed, also my sea letter! The one from Baron Knorp's substitute, the other from the Governor of Nicolaievsk!

"And, as they bear the seal of the Russian Minister of the Interior, your naval superior cannot touch me!"

"You are a Russian?" demanded the officer, courteously.

"Ivan Petroff, at your service!" bowed the sailing master, "formerly ensign, Russian Navy, and, since sixty-nine, an American citizen, under the treaty of Alaska, duly registered, and my citizenship is duly recorded at the Russian Consulate at San Francisco! There is my flag! You dare not violate it! I am the

owner of this boat! Here are my Russian papers! Now, sir, I will answer to the Russian and American consuls here, jointly, for any alleged irregularities! I shall now go and claim their joint protection and have a guard from each placed on my vessel!

"I can be libelled in the Mixed Court if I owe anyone anything, and I also go now to call on the Japanese Governor and demand the protection of the forts! I know the Prince of Matsumai very well!"

The young officer was thunderstruck!

"As I foresaw this trick, I telegraphed from Otaru to both the consuls, day before yesterday!" calmly said Petroff, "and so, I fancy that you are powerless!"

"Will you come on the 'Vsadnik' and see my superior?" entreatingly said the genial young fellow.

"As a visitor, with the consuls I have named—yes! Otherwise, if I am summoned, he and you can go to the devil!" cried Petroff. "Now, mark you! I will defend my boat!"

And then, with a smile of triumph, Petroff pointed to two boats approaching, flying the Russian and American flags.

"There they come; you can now speak with them!"

And tossing the Japanese boatman a Mexican dollar, Petroff was paddled to the "Water Witch," where Markham followed him.

"Let them wrangle it out, Markham!" said Petroff. "Man the launch! I must go away to the 'Forfarshire!' There she whistles for me! Remember! keep the cabins locked until I return!"

To the astonishment of the excited Markham, the sampan paddled alongside, and the young Russian, cap in hand, said: "Captain Petroff, I have to apologize for the attempt to board your boat!"

"Come on board, then, with the consuls, Lieutenant!" cordially cried the overjoyed Petroff, meeting him at the gangway. "This steamer and all her property and rights are held for the absent owners, through the consular gentlemen, until orders can be received from San Francisco! I only hold the title for them!"

"Perfectly correct!" chimed the consuls in chorus, as Petroff produced the inevitable champagne.

"I will remain here, Perrot," cried Henry Fox, the American Consul. "While you go and see the Count Lansdorf. He is a good fellow and the Austrian Consul and I were with him last night."

"Marsham," cried the sailing master, "Consul Fox is in charge." And then the tall engineer exchanged hand grasps with the young Consul over a beaker of wine.

"And I, Lieutenant Kolasky," said the Russian Consul, "will follow you in the 'Saimir' and clear you of all embarrassment. I mention officially, to tall in Captain Lamert to-day. I've been at a supper with our Austrian colleague and I must also say good-bye to my friend Lansdorf."

"The men's shore leave will begin at noon," said Perrot. "Only one engineer is to remain on board with one fireman. I'll send a Japanese cook and waiter to relieve our servants. I will be back then!"

Lighting his cigar, Perrot dashed away in the little launch, followed by the Russian consular and naval boats.

"My young friend," gravely said Consul Gradsky, "Captain Lamert was in the verge of a serious blunder! I have orders from Admiral at Nagasaki, and the Russian Minister at Tokio, to protect this party and to give them every aid and assistance!"

When the huge "Britannia" swung around, and slowly gathered headway, an hour later, Captain Perrot, Consul Harvey Fox and Chevalier Mollenhaupt were a guard of honor gathered around the young stranger whose name was boldly entered on the ship's passenger list as "Count Bemo Lansdorf, Schloss Karolyi, Ischl, Austria!"

The ship's purser, the center of a bevy of young feminine globe trotters, said, patronizingly, to them: "He is an Austrian nobleman of vast wealth, going down to Hongkong with us to take the P. & O. boat at Hongkong for Southampton! He has four chests of gold in our strong room, and he has given our Captain five hundred pounds to gain a day on our schedule, so that he can catch the mail boat!"

"And, is that wild-looking man his attendant?" lisped a pretty charmer.

"That is his hunter and guide—who accompanied him across Siberia!"

But, all unconscious of the admiration of the women, the Count Lansdorf gravely thanked his consular friends as they offered to escort him out of the harbor.

"Thanks, dear friends!" he said, in a musical English voice, with an indescribably sad intonation, as he gazed at the trim lines of the "Vsadnik," whose blue and white flag duly acknowledged the salute of the "Forfarshire." "I have Chevalier Möllenhaupt's Austrian passport duly visad. I am under the English Union Jack, with my passage paid! There is no power on earth which dares to drag a man from under the shadow of the British flag!"

He drew Ivan Petroff aside and then whispered a few words which made the Russian sailing master stagger.

"Remember, Ivan!" he cried, "I have your sworn promise. You belong to me, now!"

Turning to the Austrian Chevalier, Count Lansdorf handed him a slip of paper. "Send this cablegram at once, the moment that you reach your office, my dear Chevalier," he said. "And remember, Schloss Karolyi is your home, whenever you will honor it!"

To the jovial Harvey Fox, he gave his hand and said: "On your trip home, next year on leave, if you do not find me at the Hotel de Choiseul, Paris, I will be at Schloss Karolyi, and Möllenhaupt, you and I are to have a month's hunting! And Ischl can show you Magyar beauties to rival your geisha girls—not mere human dolls, but women with hearts of flame!"

Taking a gold piece from his pocket, he tossed it in the gleaming sapphire waves. "For luck!" he cried, as the "Water Witch's" launch sped away, towing the two consular boats.

And then, he began the tramp of a sentinel upon the broad decks.

"It might be the mad Hamlet on the platform at Elsinore!" cried one of the pouting ladies, who learned before they reached Hongkong that the Count Lansdorf

communed only with the wild waves and the free winds of heaven!

Over a choice breakfast at the Russian Consulate, Consul Vladimir Gradsky and his Austrian colleague talked in whispers of the haphazard visit of the "Water Witch," while Ivan Petroff and the American official, Harvey Fox, were cozily seated in the cabin of the victorious boat.

"The best way, my friend Petroff," said Consul Fox, "is to send all the luggage and effects of your absent master, Rezoff, over to my Consulate! Now, I will send the boat ashore for my consular clerk and our 'compradores.'

"All your treasure, sealed by yourself and myself, will go at once to the bank, and be deposited there by me, in your presence, as 'trustee for yourself and the absent owners, to order.'

So send all your crew off on their frolic! I will leave a guard of four of my men and my marshal in possession here! One of your engineers can stay here, with one fireman, after to-morrow morning! They can alternate!

"I will hoist my Consular flag on the boat, and, when we have received the treasure, we will lock and seal all your cabins!

Though gossip was rife, no one in Hakodate ever knew the value or origin of the twenty-four sealed cartridge boxes, which were duly deposited in the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, after being duly iron strapped and double sealed!

A couple of sampans, with a Japanese marine policeman in each, kept all curious loiterers at a cable's length from the boat, which had made a five thousand mile run in two months without breaking a rod or heating a single bearing!

Before the crew left the steamer, Petroff, in the presence of the Consul, addressed them sternly: "One name alone is never to be mentioned, the name of our beloved absent master, 'Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff!' The Russian spies, the consular followers, and the naval people here may tempt you!

"Any man who breaks his word will forfeit his pre-

miums and the six months wages I promised you if the 'Eighty-Five' made her trip without touching a rock or stopping for repairs!"

"You can depend on us to our last drop of blood!" cried Markham.

"Go, then, men!" said Petroff. "When you are out of money, go in to the American Consulate! You will find plenty there, and, you are not spending your own, remember!

"After to-morrow, two men must be on board day and night, and I will be either here or at the American Consulate! No one dares to interfere with us now!"

With loud hurrahs, the excited crew disappeared in a flotilla of sampans, Markham being paymaster for the "crowd," as he termed them.

Before a week was over, the "golden crew" of the "Water Witch" were the lords of Hakodate, and an American eagle, beautifully carven and gilded, ornamented the stern of the mysterious steamer, whose bows now also bore beautiful gilded carvings of laurel, palm, oak and olive, surrounding the well-earned name, "Water Witch."

Ten days later, two telegrams were brought to Ivan Petroff as he sat in the American Consulate, engaged in a grave conference with Vladimir Gradsky and the captain of the "Vsadnik."

Harvey Fox gazed curiously at Petroff when the sailing master tossed over to the young consul Count Lansdorf's dispatch from Hongkong: "All right now. On board the 'Turanian'; will leave boat at Malta and go direct to Paris, Hotel Choiseul; report to me by telegraph all news of Rezoff."

The other despatch Ivan Petroff leisurely deciphered with a code book and then he turned to the two Russian officials.

"Gentlemen!" he said gravely, "I have received your offers from the Russian Government and I have cabled them to my principals, as well as your invitation to visit Admiral Lemacheffsky at Vladivostock, to confer as to the sale of the 'Water Witch,' her plans and working drawings.

"I can now answer you. By the authority just received I can give you our final decision.

"We decline to accept your offer; we will set no price upon our boat. It will be dismantled here, the hull will be housed, the engines will be practically dismounted and the boat house sealed, then, placed under guard of the Japanese authorities, in charge of my friend, Consul Fox.

Pending the proposed sale to the Japanese Government, I am directed to tell you that the attempt to stop us on the Amoor at Nicolaievsk, the chase at Dui, the firing on us by the corvette, your attempt to seize the boat here—all these are only instances of broken faith, to add to the crowning outrage of the arrest of Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff.

And I am ordered not to trust to that official honor which has betrayed him!"

The two Russian officials sprang to their feet in rage.

"No violence! No insults, gentlemen!" said Petroff. "Pray remember that I was an ensign in the Russian Navy, and that I will exact the code of honor to its utmost! And since I became an American, I have also learned to be a dead shot! It is peace or war, just as you decide! Our affair is finished! I shall leave two of my best men in charge here, disband my crew and return to America!"

"If we should wish to confer further?" said the cautious Gradsky, who greatly coveted a certain glittering order and hoped to win it in effecting the purchase of this triumph of the National Works, as well as Yarrow and Thornycroft.

"Then address me by letter through Levassoff, your consul at Nagasaki!" frankly said Petroff. "But I will plainly tell you—the Rezoff outrage has ended all our desire to meet you! You have broken faith all along the line!"

And then, with lowering brows, the Russian agents left their victorious foe.

It was on the morning after the sailing of the "Forfarshire" from Hakodate that the Princess Esmè Chilkoff, seated in a summer house at "Mon Plaisir,"

languidly lifted her head as a servant approached with a telegram lying on a silver tray.

"The twentieth of August!" the beautiful woman murmured as she dismissed the old servitor. "Two weeks—it seems a year—since I gave up all hope! Has Allan Law betrayed me, or some fatal accident ruined the work of three whole years of my life?"

With dilated eyes, she read the words printed on the long tape, "Sail on 'Forfarshire' to-day for Hongkong. Passage thence on 'Turanian' to Malta. Send Ali Roustan to meet me at the Hotel Choiseul. Will await letters from you at Schloss Karolyi." The signature, "Benno Lansdorf," seemed to swim before her eyes.

With a gasp the Circassian princess sank back. It was half an hour later when Natalie Ignatieff returned from a drive to find the Circassian orphan raving in a high fever.

"Nothing to tell why! No reason, Natalie?" cried the frantic Baroness Fadieff, "only the suspicion of a hidden love affair!

"Read this telegram! I found it lying beside her.

"There was a Lansdorf, an Austrian attaché here, two winters ago—a proud, splendid fellow! I remember him! How she has hidden this secret so long, I know not! She is planning a flight! But, we must keep this secret!"

Compressing her lips, Natalie Ignatieff sighed as she dropped the telegram. "Poor Sacha Menchikoff! He will kill himself if she marries this Austrian! Send to the camp for the Brigade Surgeon on the gallop! Bid him ride for life and death!"

And the household then, dumbly waited for the Death Angel's coming!

CHAPTER X.

AN AMERICAN APPEAL.

Seated on his couch or pacing his cell's stone floor like a caged tiger, Allan Law passed the first three days of his confinement in the exhaustion following an impotent rage.

For not a moment—day or night—was he freed from the eyes of the two Cossacks, seated in the diagonal corners of the room.

Only a stolid obedience was pictured in their unfeeling eyes.

He could hear all the merry chatter of the great road along the north side of the "Golden Horn," the wafted notes of the band on Admiral Crown's flagship, the "Vladimir Monomak," and the orchestra delighting the gay ladies in the palace garden.

Thrice a day the stern old Major warder gazed at him, turning on his heel with a muttered caution to the sentinels. The harsh growl left no doubt of its purport.

Though not a book, no writing materials, nor distractions were allowed him, Allan Law smiled bitterly at the excellent table service—the pheasants, venison, luscious oysters, unrivaled fish, and even the breakfast white wine and the bottle of Beaune for dinner.

Cigars, cigarettes and the comforts of coffee and cognac were not missing.

"Not a bad sort of a Bastille! It is the 'beyond' which will develop the ferocity of the Bear!" he mused.

A hundred vague fears now beset the lonely man.

Notwithstanding Colonel Milanovitch's assurances, Allan Law feared the violent seizure of the boat.

"Unless Petroff has stolen her and run away, unless he buys his freedom with a half of his smuggled gold, these wily Muscovites will probably trap the party at the mouth of the Amoor!

"And how in Heaven's name would Petroff get the

boat over to Japan, past their fleet and the cloud of torpedo boats! Who has betrayed me?"

A day's self-examination led to the conclusion that either Wardlawe had conceived a mad passion for Esmè Chilkoff, or that the local merchants had, in some way, discovered the secret and denounced their rival!

The delay in any preliminary examination led Law to believe that the all powerful Admiral Lemacheffsky meant to first capture the whole boat's crew and then use them as witnesses against their absent chief.

"Petroff seemed bluff, brave and true! An old Ensign of their Navy, it was probably Gorlitz who secretly selected him. If the Princess Esmè did, he may try to aid me. Oh! For a single cablegram to Levassoff, or Gorlitz, at San Francisco! They are not bound to silence by any fantastic vows of honor! The American, where is he? Has he sold my secret? It is the thirteenth of August! He may be still at Dui, or already on his way back—perhaps, aiding this Admiral to trap me to the forfeit of my life! Beg aid from him?

"Never!"

And then, with a groan, Allan Law recalled the mean secret service trap laid for Wardlawe, in England's hour of peril!

"It is Nemesis!" bitterly reflected Law, "and now he will be unconsciously revenged!"

Standing at the window, marking the "Hiogo Maru" gliding out of the beautiful bay, Law finally resolved to silently stand his ground!

"I must live and die here as 'Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff,' for an appeal to the Princess Esmé, to Ignatieff, or the disclosure of my real rank, any of these would steep me in craven dishonor!

"If Petroff could only get to Nagasaki in time, he may be able to arouse Levassoff's interest. It is hopeless to wish for that. The Baron seemed to be a good fellow, in his own way, Jewish in his love of life; he might strongly intercede, at second hand!"

One slender gleam of hope alone remained! "Adjutant Valerianoff!"

"Alas, the poor fellow can not pass these fatal steel

grillages! These Cossacks are of the true bulldog breed! The Major, too, seems to be a pattern brute!"

All his past life slowly rolled past Allan Law as the prison gloom deepened in his soul! The boyish loves, the service memories, the kaleidoscopic scenes of globe trotting, his Continental life, and the desperate intrigues of his volunteer "secret service" efforts for Her Majesty's Government.

"The biter bit!" he bitterly laughed. "I only hope this grim Yankee may not reproach me with my clumsiness. He, to return, and perhaps marry Esmè!"

The thought was sheer madness!

Another, a second cruel pang tortured him. "Out here, this stern Admiral is a law unto himself! He may simply 'efface me!'

"Found dead in his bed, that's all! That will be the report!

"And, my God, Esmè will never know that I have kept her faith!"

He was awakened from dreams of the mountain palace of Dariel; he was still wandering with Ali Roustan in the Princess Chilkoff's sequestered domains, as a hand lightly brushed his face in the midnight.

Springing up, the Cossack kneeling over him, pointed anxiously to the other sentinel, now fast asleep.

With a finger pressed on his lip, the rude soldier pressed a paper into Law's hand.

And, then, stealing back to his place, the warden resumed his silent watch.

With a beating heart, Allan Law waited until daylight and then he read the gallant Valerianoff's scrawl!

"We are moving heaven and earth to save you! Do not anger the Admiral! You are to be brought before him! We will all cling to you to the last! Guard your speech! Insist on your Russian identity; Your papers seem all regular! If you can summon any help from Europe, do so! Otherwise, if you go before a Summary Tribunal, we fear for the result! I will try and telegraph myself to St. Petersburg! Confide in no one! A single damaging admission may send you to the scaffold! Burn this!"

It was ten o'clock on the seventeenth of August, when the Major, entering Allan Law's cell, bade the prisoner follow him.

With a firm tread, the young man passed through a double rank of riflemen, and, entering a carriage, was swiftly driven westward under a company escort to the splendid palace mansion of the Governor General.

A half dozen men, with drawn revolvers, marched on either side of the carriage, and, the passersby, on the board sidewalks, dropped their eyes in sympathetic fear.

"One more!" sighed a stately convict beauty, once the delight of the Moscow stage, as she forgot her own murdered lover, in gazing at the helpless prisoner.

"A short trip from the Military Court Room to the gallows!"

But, Law's proudly grave face touched the attendants, as he was ushered into the audience room of Admiral Lemacheffsky.

His guards, divided in groups, the stern Major Warden replendent in full uniform, stood at attention, as the gray headed Admiral, followed by a dozen staff officers, and clerks, took his seat under the canopy covering the magnificent portraits of the Imperial pair.

Allan Law's glances rested on the magnificent gold, silver and jewel decked icon where a priceless antique lamp burned day and night before the Madonna's face.

He had hardly time to note the clustered stars and orders on Lemacheffsky's breast, when the old sailor sternly demanded, "Name?"

"Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff!" calmly answered Law.

"Nationality?" "Russian, merchant, first class, Kharkov!"

Allan Law noted the fumbling of his captured papers, a bundle lying before the great autocrat, who replaced the Czar in a territory greater than France.

Lord of a million subjects, chief of an army of fifty thousand, a navy of forty vessels, Anatole Arcadievitch Lemacheffsky was a martinet by the stern habitude of forty years of varied service.

"Remember, prisoner, your answers will be all used against you at the Summary Court Martial if you try to deceive me. Do you persist that this is your right name and status? Are you noble?"

"Yes!" proudly cried the accused, in a ringing voice.

His fluent and sonorous Russian attracted the attention of all the listeners.

"What other languages do you speak?" queried the Admiral, gazing through a pair of horn rimmed crystal spectacles, at his victim.

"French, German, a little Italian, and, some Spanish," said the young man.

"English?" persisted the great man.

Allan Law stood mute.

"Record that he refuses to answer!" roared the irate dignitary.

"Do you still refuse?" was Lemacheffsky's second query.

And, still no answer, while the clerks gazed sadly at each other, and the officers uneasily moving, rattled their swords.

Picking up a red book, stamped with an Imperial crown, and the double headed Russian eagle, the Admiral solemnly read:

"Article 38. Offenses punishable with death or life imprisonment, by sentence of an Extraordinary Court. First.—False Impersonation, Treason, Sedition, Mutiny, Perjury before a Court of Trial, Spying, Plots against the Crown or Government, Entering a Military Reserve in Disguise," the reader paused, and then threw his whole indignation into the query:

"Will you now deny, on oath, that you are Allan Law, one time, a Captain of English Light Artillery, one time, Extra Attachè of the British Embassy at Paris?"

Fifty pairs of eyes were fixed sternly upon the prisoner, who quietly answered in Russian, "I am a civilian; my papers are all regular. I have committed no offense. I deny your right to try me, or to force me to an oath. I protest!"

A roar of anger drowned Law's sullen voice.

Rising to his feet, the Admiral cried: "Taken under a false name and, with illegally obtained Russian papers, within the limits of the military reserve, the Littoral; arrested here as a spy of the English secret service, you will be given one week, and then, brought before an Extraordinary Military Court for summary trial and judgment. Take him away!"

The old man's head shook with anger as he grasped his jewelled sword, the gift of a dead Emperor.

"Am I to have counsel?" boldly cried Allan Law.

"The President of your Court will inform you of all your legal rights!" roared Lemacheffsky, vanishing through a side door.

As Law was marched away he saw the pale, agonized face of Lieutenant Valerianoff.

In the young Adjutant's eyes there was all the anguish of a mute farewell.

Half an hour later, the prisoner threw himself on his couch in a sullen despair.

"It will be a grim farce, ending in a swift tragedy," he groaned, as he turned his face to the wall.

And then, began the cruel tiger play of Russian justice!

Visits from crafty officers, their hands covered with turquoise rings, calmly puffing perfumed cigarettes, as they urged the accused to confess all, and, "throw himself on the mercy of the Governor-General."

A half dozen sly pleaders exhausted themselves, until, goaded to madness, Allan Law stood at bay.

"You desire me to put a rope around the neck of my comrades," he cried. "To enable you to confiscate my steamer and the property of my associates, to be the hangman of others? Never! Take my poor life! I am not fool as well as victim! I know Russian Justice! I was born in Russia!"

Shrugging his shoulders, the last agent departed to keep a tryst with a convict beauty! "None so blind, mon cher, as those who will not see! Your obstinacy is a mere 'felo de se!' You will think better of this before the Manchurian hangman kicks the bench from under you!"

"Coward!" sharply cried Law, as the officer only smiled and showed his polished fang-like teeth.

"As you will, Monsieur!" grinned the Chief Aide of the Admiral. "We are not likely to meet again for some time, at least, and so, I say, Adieu!"

Brave by nature, buoyed up by a patrician training, Allan Law summoned all his pride to resist the scornful glances of the rough old Major, who thrice a day, found him "still obdurate."

It was on a rainy day a week later that the lonely man was thrust into a khibitka and taken a half a mile to a two-story log house, under the escort of a gray frocked company of infantry, their bayonets reversed on the sockets, a fatal sign.

The splash of the cool rain revived the fevered prisoner, whose mind was wavering now.

"One appeal to her might save me," he muttered, "or, else send her to Siberia!"

And yet, life seemed sweet, as the breath of the fragrant pines was wafted from the forests of the little river at the head of the bay. He was young, in the heyday of life and the wine of youth surged in his full veins.

But, ushered into a hall where seven field officers sat around a long table, Allan Law was recalled to his bitter present.

"Have you counsel?" demanded Colonel Gribayedoff, when the long presentment was read.

"None!" replied the prisoner.

"Do you know any one here?" growled the Judge Advocate.

"Only Lieutenant Valerianoff, Adjutant of the Kazan Regiment! I would like to consult him!"

"Let him be summoned!" gruffly said the Colonel, and, then, for a half an hour, the Court broke up, returning to their vodki and cigarettes, while the clerks unceasingly scratched with their pens.

A roar of laughter followed a joke of the President as Valerianoff was ushered in, a half an hour later.

"Let them talk alone here!" said Colonel Gribayedoff, "while we breakfast. We will take the case up at two."

Seated in a corner, the gallant youth pleaded for an hour alone with the English prisoner.

But, still hiding himself under the mask of "Rezoff," Law absolutely declined to be sworn or to make any admissions.

"I will not forfeit my honor, even to save my life!" gloomily said Law.

"You must have friends, loved ones, some one to mourn for you! Think of them," pleaded Valerianoff.

"If you are a Russian in good faith, there is the telegraph; make a pseudo-confession."

"Tell the Admiral anything, to induce him to delay. Let me send a telegraph for you. There is the American, Wardlawe,—now—pleading, night and day, with Lemacheffsky to send you back to Russia for judgment. The old man will not! He says it would show that a spy steamer had ascended the Amoor, in safety; it has arrived, after a hot chase in Hakodate, Japan, and so, both he and Baron Knorp would lose their commands and perhaps even rank and pension if it reached the Minister of the Interior."

"Then the 'Water Witch' is safe, with all her crew, at Hakodate?" cried Law. "Thank God! I can now die in peace! I drag no innocent men down! Petroff was true, then; he did not betray me."

"But, mark you, Valerianoff, this American is my bitterest secret enemy!"

"You wrong him, by the God above," cried Valerianoff passionately, breaking off his discourse in French, as the Court filed in from its cosy dinner at the Hotel Weletsky.

In a silent agony the Adjutant heard all Law's answers before the Admiral read with due solemnity.

"The prisoner will now be sworn and answer the queries of the Court," said Colonel Gribayedoff.

In a steady voice, Allan Law calmly stated the same reasons for declining to be sworn.

The Court exchanged significant glances, while Gribayedoff's face blackened in a ferocious scowl.

"Contumacy!" cried the President, "Remove the prisoner!"

In ten minutes, standing, Allan Law received the

judgment of "wilful contumacy against the laws of the Czar."

"Now, Prosecutor, hear the telegram of the President of the Merchants' Guild of Kharkov.

In a sickening silence, Law listened to the words. "There is no merchant of the first class in Kharkov named 'Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff!' No such man has been on the guild rolls for ten years, as per an official search of the archives."

"What say you, prisoner," thundered the triumphant Colonel.

Allan Law stood mute, stricken with his fatal blunder.

"I should have hired a temporary character," he mused. "The real man could have waited abroad. This is fatal!" he sighed.

An hour later, the Captain of the Cossack escort had testified to Rezoff's arrest, within the limits of the Littoral, to the discovery of his papers, and the facts of his first voluntary statement.

Lieutenant Valerianoff's appeal, urging clemency, delay and a removal of the prisoner to Russia, for positive identification, his civil status, his innocence of all overt acts, the harmlessness of his captured note book, all this fell on deaf ears.

"You have not proved him to be Allan Law, an English subject," he closed.

"And you dare not execute him without verifying that alleged fact!"

With the Adjutant bending near him, in a last impassioned pleading, Allan Law awaited his judgment, until the sun had sunk below the western hills.

The sound of long wrangling came from the closed court room, as the friends were pent in the ante room, by the brutal-faced guards.

Suddenly the door opened, clouds of cigarette smoke rushed out, and, in a gloom lit by a few tallow dips, "Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff" was found "guilty as charged," and, sentenced to death by hanging!

"Three days are allotted for an opportunity to confess and receive the last rites of the Orthodox religion,

if the Archimandrite find the accused to be a real member of the Greek Catholic Church.

Stunned with the brutal verdict, Allan Law was swiftly reconducted to the prison.

Valerianoff's last words were ringing in his ears.

"I will now concert with the American. He swears that you must be saved!"

And sleep came not to the eyes of the lonely condemned, on this horrible night of judgment!

Little did the prisoner know of the messages clicked over the wires to far away St. Petersburg; of the signals flashed by cable to Nagasaki, to San Francisco, and, that stout Ivan Petroff was half crazed at Hakodate, with his impotent sorrow.

Sunset of the first day found Allan Law in a moral stupor. He had resolutely fought off the priest who vainly offered the consolation of religion.

"I go where all beliefs are finally judged!" the young man gravely said. "Leave me to my fate!"

To the Major warder, who, for the last time, hinted at some clemency following a full confession. Law only said, "Insult me no more! Give me writing materials."

"It is denied!" brutally replied the warder.

"Then leave me!" cried Law, "or, I will brain you with this stool!"

At nine o'clock the iron door swung, and a tall form entered, the Major calling away the two guards.

Law's untasted dinner still stood on the table as the American Major sprang to his side, having first blown out the four blinking candles.

"Madman!" whispered Wardlawe, in English. "I come to save you! The Admiral is on his way here! Shall I tell your true story? Will you not telegraph to her? Ask your release! I know the fantastic spirit of adventure which brought you here!"

"Swear that you will only tell her of what I disclose?"

"I do," said Wardlawe, wringing the young man's hands. "They shall bury me at your side; you shall not die!"

"Peace!" sadly answered Allan Law, "I have your oath not to betray me. Who disclosed my identity?"

"God knows!" muttered Wardlawe. "Could you have been followed from Russia? There was Menchikoff! He knew you as a friend of the English Embassy! He hated you! He swore to have your life! Will you not telegraph to Count Ignatieff, to your own Foreign office, or to the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg?"

"They are coming. Light the candles, quickly!" said Allan Law. "You're a good fellow, Wardlawe, after all!

"Get me the favor that I may write a few letters to be given into your hands! You leave soon?"

"In two weeks, for San Francisco," muttered Wardlawe.

"Swear that you will place the letters in her own hands, and, then, forget me! I will stand mute!"

The dash of a carriage, the trampling of an escort sounded on the evening air.

Entering abruptly, with a wave of his hand, Admiral Lemacheffsky dismissed all his staff, and gazed keenly at both the prisoner and Wardlawe.

Turning with courtesy to the American, the Governor-General said, "Here, before the prisoner, will you tell me by what name he was known at Nagasaki?"

"Only as "Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff," Your Excellency," said Wardlawe, firmly.

"You recognize the man?"

"It is the same to whom I turned over certain papers, by orders of my principals!"

"And in your belief, he is not Allan Law, a British subject."

The young man sighed as Wardlawe firmly said: "I only know him as 'Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff!' The Russian Consul Levassoff so presented him to me!"

"Levassoff is not on trial! He may have been deceived! And, you have never heard him speak English?"

"Never!" cried Wardlawe, with a prayer to the recording angel.

"You will make a frightful error of judgment, Admiral, to proceed to extremes in this case! My God! Think of your agony of condemning an innocent man! This man is no spy, and, I know it!"

The old Admiral gazed helplessly from the one to the other.

"For the last time I offer you, prisoner, an opening. Let the boat and the crew be brought here from Hakodate to await the final action of the Government! Admit your real status, and give the names of your secret masters; those who sent you out to Siberia!

"I will then suspend sentence, until Minister Tolstoi can revise the whole case! Major Wardlawe can communicate with your friends."

Springing to his feet, Allan Law cried: "Thank Heavens, the others are out of your clutches! Let me die, but tempt me to no dishonor!

"Major Wardlawe is a witness of your brutality. I only ask that I may entrust to him my last letters, and that he may witness my execution. My body is to be delivered to him for final removal to Kharkov."

"This I grant," gruffly cried Lemacheffsky. "At sundown of the second day, unless you ask clemency and confess, you die! You can at any time call the Major warden. An officer will be placed near you now every moment. Your blood be on your own head! I will know what led you to this examination of the Amoor from its mouth to Nertchinsk!"

Allan Law bowed his head. "Seek the answer in my felon's grave! You are outraging humanity, and some greedy wretch has belied me! You wish to steal the boat, its secrets, its plans, and then force the crew to operate it! Leave me to die in peace!"

As Lemacheffsky stormed away, Allan Law dropped Esmè's signet ring into Wardlawe's hand.

"Faithful to death! Tell her this," he whispered, and then, throwing his head in his hands, burst into tears.

The American Major, in silence, followed the Admiral back to the palace where he had been the guest of the Czar's Viceroy over Eastern Siberia.

Standing in the great audience room, the two men faced each other in silence.

The splendid supper table was already spread in the adjoining hall.

Wardlawe's own voice seemed strained as he solemnly addressed his host.

"You will pardon me, Admiral," he said, "if I beg you to release me from your friendly hospitality and allow me to join Sergeant Crampton, my valet, and attendants at the Hotel Weletsky!"

"Anything further?" growled the old commander, flushing purple.

"Yes, sir!" boldly continued Wardlawe. "I ask to have my passports visad for an immediate departure, as well as those of my followers. I wish to be allowed to cable to Japan and America, in cipher, without the censorship, and, to be allowed to telegraph to the American Ambassador at St. Petersburg, as well as Admiral Chestakoff, your own Minister of Marine, and the Count Nicholas Ignatieff. I shall inform every authority near of this unjust sentence, and, when I have received this poor victim's last wishes, and witnessed his judicial murder, I leave Siberia, never to return.

"The National Works can send some other agent here! I give up my trust forever."

"As for the Amoor Navigation Company," the Admiral's face grew livid, "I risked my life for your country, in its hour of trial! I am sorry, now, I did not aid England! Ah! Napoleon was right. 'Grattez le Russe et, vous trouverez le Tartar!"

Speechless with rage, the Governor-General called his Aide-de-camp.

"Major Wardlawe has the unrestricted use of cables and telegraphs, with no censorship. Visa all the passports of his party for immediate departure. He alone is to visit the English spy, and witness his execution. Let him have free access!"

"There is no Japanese steamer in two weeks!" said the astounded Aide.

"I will hire the little steamer lying here in charter to take me to Hakodate. After this brutal murder, my life, the life of my brave men, is unsafe!

"Not an American workman shall ever land at Dui without the express guarantee of the Czar! I am a soldier! I despise all butchery!"

"Call my carriage!" roared Admiral Lemacheffsky!

"Pardon, I will walk!" gravely said Major Wardlawe, as he went out alone into the night, despite the Aide-de-camp's frenzied entreaties.

"My God! Hospitality! Think of it! No hangman's hospitality," cried Wardlawe, shaking off his friendly pursuer.

For two hours, Wardlawe at the great telegraph station of the Magic City, which has leaped from thirty to a hundred and fifty thousand in fifteen years, wrote dispatch after dispatch.

But, the first one was the message which made the Danish Chief of the Telegraph tremble!

Addressed to Count Nicholas Ignatieff, Mon Plaisir Kiev,—its lines were full of a stern meaning.

"Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff, merchant first class, of Kharkov, is adjudged to die here by hanging, as a British spy, in two days. He closely resembles your friend Allan Law! It is a brutal outrage! A murderous mistake. Notify the Princess Esmè Chilkoff. You must telegraph to Minister Tolstoi, and to Admiral Chestakoff. I leave Siberia on this happening never to return. Have telegraphed to the National Works. You must obtain an order for the Governor-General here to suspend sentence, and send this man back to St. Petersburg. He is innocent and I know it. I have vainly protested to Admiral Lemacheffsky. Answer me at once. Hotel Weletsky."

"I dare not send this!" muttered the Danish official, pushing back the five hundred roubles laid down by the irate American. "You will do all that this gentleman orders!" said the Governor-General's First Aide, as he entered, begging Wardlawe to return to the official palace.

"Never! I would starve first!" sadly said the Major, who waited grimly till he obtained a dated and timed receipt for each dispatch.

"No copies to be made of these!" said the Aide.

"Report the safe delivery to every one personally, to Admiral Lemacheffsky!"

The frightened official swore to comply as he noted the tense suffering of the faces of the two men.

"At least, Major Wardlawe, you will come to our Military and Naval Club Mess, as my guest? It adjoins the prison. You can then see this poor devil at will. Spare the Admiral's broken heart! He is crazed that you have left his house!"

"I will go with you, Colonel Radetsky," murmured Wardlawe. "This is my fault! I have played the fool! Poor boy! He, as well as I, became as wax in her hands!"

And, while the startled staff officers talked in whispers, next day, Admiral Lemacheffsky sat alone, wrapped in a gloomy despair.

Pride and hospitality were warring in his heart! "If they learn of the escape of this boat, both Knorp and I are ruined!"

In a household, darkened with sorrow, where the lovely Esmè Chilkoff lay tossing in a burning fever, the world wearied Count Nicholas Ignatieff read the telegram with amazement, which reached him at Mon Plaisir on the day before Allan Law's decreed execution.

Calling his wife into his study, the ex-Dictator gave her the fateful message. "You must watch over this dying girl!" he grimly said. "My carriage is ordered. I shall not leave the Central Telegraph Bureau till I hear from Lemacheffsky that he has countermanded this intended butchery."

"Send my valet and travelling luggage on to St. Petersburg, I shall be away a week. For I will not return until I have solved this mystery and discovered the whereabouts of Prince Agar Chilkoff. He must be called back if Esmè dies, and, *where is he?*

"As for her, she can not be questioned. It would kill her. Say nothing of this, should she recover her mind."

"Nicholas!" cried his wife, clasping him in her arms, her face suffused with blushes.

"Do you think"——

"I think nothing, Natalie!" the old Count sadly answered.

"Oh, you women, you women! My God! How often you play with fire. God grant that I may avert a murder!"

And he sped away, four miles to Kiev, with the coachman lashing the troika horses to madness.

"For your life, for your life!" the stern Count cried.

"And, but for Wardlawe, this mystic witch, this shining wonder, would have sent the last of his line to a gallows.

"Truly, Ayesha's child is a law unto herself, and yet, what a heart beats in that wild bosom!

"My God! If it should be Allan Law and he die before our orders reach that blockhead. On! On!

There was a strange convocation in the Military and Naval Club at Vladivostock on the last night, allotted on earth to Allan Law!

Colonel Milanovitch of the Kazan Regiment was seated in the centre of a group of saddened men.

The grizzled old hero was still booted and spurred, mud splashed with his ride of four days from Habaroffka.

Colonel Radetsky, the Admiral's chief of staff, with Adjutant Valerianoff, listened to Milanovitch's impassioned words.

"By God!" the veteran cried. "This must not be!" Where is this brave American, Wardlawe?"

"Spending the last twenty-four hours in the cell with Rezoff!" sadly said Radetsky. "There is a haunting mystery here. I have passed an hour with this Rezoff. I slyly led him over ground which proves both his Russian birth and nurture. He may be a romantic madman, but he is no Englishman. He knows our idioms, our folklore, our childish games, and even our songs better than I do. And yet he will not be sworn."

"What said he?" asked Milanovitch!

"He has given me a sealed letter, countersigned by Major Wardlawe. This brave American has thrown up his work in disgust and we can now turn to Germany, Japan or England, perhaps even to France, for

our great works at Dui, which will delay us two years here, and so, our possible foes of the future will gain all the secrets of the Gate of the East. This is the contents of the letter in general," sighed Radetsky. "Rezoff looked like a prince as he said, I could save my life by subterfuge, or breaking my word of honor. I will do neither! I come of a line that knows no fear, a race which does not lie! I leave no one to mourn my fate! I have been simply trapped to my death, I know not how!"

Yet, for all this, honor seals my lips. Major Wardlawe alone, at the last, will have my confidence, and I have requested that he may remove my remains and such poor belongings as I have here, to execute my last wishes. I leave it to him to tell my story, and to avenge me!"

"This is horrible!" cried Milanovitch. "I met Baron Knorp on the road, within eighty versts of Habaroffka. He has joined me in a telegram to the Minister of War. I led the Kazan Regiment twice into the hell of the Grivitska redoubt, and, my resignation follows this butchery, the hospitality of our Regiment was never before sullied. I lose my Generalship, my pension, but I save my honor, and the good name of the Regiment!"

"It will not be a hanging; it will be a tragedy!" mournfully said Valerianoff.

"For the American has given Rezoff two revolvers. He will defend himself when they try to drag him out, and so, force the guard to shoot him."

"I knew that he had served!" joyously cried Milanovitch. "He will force them to give him a soldier's death. Better so. Better so!"

"And, now, gentlemen, I go to Admiral Lemacheffsky. I bear an appeal from Baron Knorp. Why does Lemacheffsky not wait? He will be removed if the Americans throw up the great contracts at Dui!"

"And they held thirty-seven ships ready to aid us at the crisis. This Amoor Navigation Company may claim Rezoff as their secret agent!"

"The old man is frantic!" sadly said Radetsky.

"He fears that the double voyage of that steamer, its escape, the Hakodate fiasco, will cause his removal."

"Rightly so!" growled Milanovitch. "I go to him now. As I have resigned, I fear no one; no one, save God and the Czar!"

An hour later, Colonel Milanovitch found the stubborn old Admiral seated at a table covered with telegrams. The aged sailor was shaken in soul, and frantic with the disgrace of Wardlawe leaving an official palace to go to a common roadside hotel. None had dared as yet to tell him of Wardlawe's removal to the Army and Navy Club.

The Admiral had read with growing fears the cablegrams from Vladimir Gradsky and Ivan Petroff at Hakodate, Levassoff's appeal from Nagasaki, Gorlitz's ominous words from San Francisco, the plain warnings of Sterling Mott and Everett Marsden, which told him of the Russian Ambassador's stern interference from Washington.

Even Petroff's proposition to surrender himself for trial, and to leave the "Water Witch" in the hands of the Russian Consul at Hakodate, added to the old man's seething fever of unrest.

When the cautious Colonel Radetsky presented the commander of the Kazan Regiment, he followed the fearless Milanovitch with imploring eyes. Dark grew the scowl on the Admiral's face, when Milanovitch ended his impassioned appeal.

"I sue to you, Admiral," he cried, "for the honor of a Regiment which was almost obliterated at Austerlitz, and which has seen both Paris and Plevna yield!"

"My heart is scarred with the battles of the Czar. I have but a few years to live. I will not pass my old age in dishonor. I would see the ghost of my murdered guest."

"Go! Go! yelled Lemacheffsky. "I have the verdict of a summary Extraordinary Court Martial to sustain my decision. Let the spy yield and confess, or he dies. There is the approved sentence. Colonel Radetsky! Let it be read to the prisoner, to-night, and.

executed at sunset, to-morrow! The sunset gun will be the signal! Attend the execution yourself! Make due report to me. And now, no one again approaches me on this subject!"

"Then, there remains nothing but this!" sternly said Colonel Milanovitch.

Drawing his sword he saluted the pictures of the Czar and Czarina, knelt to the icon and, with a quick motion, broke his battle blade across his knee, and then threw the fragments, with a resounding clang on the floor!

Tearing off his shoulder knots, he cast them at Lemacheffsky's feet.

"Take them, Butcher! There is forty years of my life!" the old Veteran sternly said.

"Go to your quarters in close arrest!" cried the Admiral, seizing Milanovitch by the shoulder. "I have resigned by telegraph!" stubbornly answered the fearless man.

"Hold off your hands. I am only a country farmer now."

"Then, go to the devil," yelled the Governor-General. "I have only fools or madmen around me!"

As the Officer of the Guard rushed in, the Admiral started back. To be the butt of the whole Littoral was no laurel wreath for the Czar's Viceroy.

"Escort this insubordinate officer to his quarters, Radetsky!" said the Admiral. "Return and report to me."

All night the surgeons waited on the failing old Admiral, crushed under the weight of his passion, and still the official Pharaoh hardened his stubborn heart!

Far across the wild, lonely plains of Siberia, the birds were gaily singing in the gardens of Mon Plaiser, when Esmè Chilkoff opened her eyes to see the Countess Natalie Ignatieff bending over her with the infinite compassion of loving womanhood.

"Ah!" cried the pallid beauty, I remember—remember now! Yes! Yes! the paper—that telegram. Bring it; I must see the Count. On life and death!

Half an hour later, Natalie Ignatieff sent away her Intendant on the gallop, with Ali Roustan, who had

leaned over his young mistress, murmuring the mystic language of the Adighè.

"If you do not obey me," screamed Esmè, "I will throw myself from the window! I swear it! It is life and death which waits on my answer! Give him money, his passports! And tell no one, not a soul! Not even the Count Nicholas! Where is he?"

"At St. Petersburg!" sadly sighed the graceful Countess. "The world is all turning around at haphazard!"

And as she left Esmè with the telegram of Benno Lansdorf clutched in her hand, she saw the marvelous effect of the Circassian cordial given by the taciturn Ali Roustan.

The old man touched his head and heart significantly as he rose, after kissing Madame Ignatieff's hands. "Both sick—head and heart—Barina!" he sighed. "Watch her, guard her! Give her love and tenderness, or the Star of the Tcherkess will die a madwoman!"

And as the golden sun swept on westward, neither the sleeping Princess nor the loving Countess knew that when he sought his rest far beyond the Manchurian sky line, that the death of a dog awaited the man whom the Princess Chilkoff had sent, alone, among unknown foes on a blind quest—the daring scheme of a reckless girl.

Yet Esmè Chilkoff smiled in her sleep, for she knew that stern old Ali Roustan was now on his way to the rendezvous at Paris.

"It is not Menchikoff, it is not this Lansdorf!" sighed the agitated Countess Natalie. "She is dreaming of her brother!"

For the fevered lips only parted to murmur "Agar!" Agar!"

"If he would only come!" mused the gentle Countess, "surely Nicholas will find out at St. Petersburg why he answers not the call of a sister—a woman perhaps stricken to the death!"

When the afternoon sun sank over the western hills, where the great harbor forts grinned across the narrow

channel of the Golden Horn, only a few Japanese laborers, Chinese coolies or Corean drudges were seen on the broad unpaved streets of the city of Vladivostock.

A heavy battalion had lurched along the road to the stone walled enclosure on the hill, where, behind the police guard house, the black posts of a gallows rose grimly in plain sight above the eight-foot wall.

A squadron of Cossacks were drawn up before the guard-house next to the Army and Navy Club, and on each street corner a knot of four mounted police watched the passers-by scurry away in fear.

Not a flag drooped from ship, fort, signal station, or even the Governor's Palace! Only on the stubby mast of the Police jail, a black banner clung to the pole as if in shame.

It lacked but two hours of sunset, when the Major Commanding entered Allan Law's cell.

There—aged by ten years—Walter Wardlawe watched the man with whom he had spent the live long night of horror.

An open prayer book lay on the table before the young prisoner, whose face now gleamed with an internal calm of unearthly radiance.

Courteously raising his hand to invoke the American's silence, Law stood up, when the jail warder said solemnly: "In one hour and a half, this gentleman must retire! Half an hour before sunset the escort will move to the Police jail!"

Then, turning, he gave orders in a low tone to the four Cossacks standing at attention with loaded rifles in the corners of the room.

"All is over!" sighed Law, when the officer had gone into his anteroom. "We have a half an hour, you and I, and then give me my last hour here in silence!

"When they come for me you must leave quickly, but wait without, to see the last of the story! It will not be long—the final struggle!"

The Cossacks blinked suspiciously at each other, while the two men spoke in low murmurs undistinguishable by them.

Without, in the anteroom, two masked men stood by a table covered with straps and cords, the horrid pinionings of their ghastly trade.

Every fifteen minutes a young officer gazed into the room, through the open door, and, with a shudder, Wardlawe noted the saber and revolver at each man's side.

All the pangs of the coming death were surging through the American's heart, for Allan Law was seated gazing at the picture of Esmè Chilkoff, which Wardlawe had brought as the seal of their last mutual confidences.

Spellbound, the American dared not look at his watch. But he knew of the banded friends on watch at the Governor-General's palace, at the Danish telegraph station, at the Naval Club, and Valerianoff, mounted on his best horse, now slowly riding before the station, in plain sight of Colonel Milanovitch, also mounted before the Governor's door.

All the Service Club knew now that the commander of the Kazan Regiment had refused to enter the palace of Admiral Lemacheffsky, even at the latter's imperative summons.

"I wash my hands of this innocent blood!" the grim soldier cried.

"I leave for Odessa on the returning convict transport, as soon as I receive the acceptance of my resignation!"

And already a passport notice of five days had been filed by Milanovitch, as a civilian.

When the warder entered to warn the American for the last time, the engineer clasped the rude official's hands. "Let me remain to the last!"

"It is my painful duty!" the soldier said. "He must be pinioned in fifteen minutes. In God's name, I beg you to retire then before they enter!"

Some horrible fascination possessed Wardlawe and forced him to gaze upon the face of the young man who now silently took the American's hands.

"Go, go, Wardlawe, in mercy to me!" murmured Allan Law. "Take the picture now—tell her—tell

her—I never kissed her in life, but that with dying lips, I sealed my love and faith!"

"Great God! It shall not be!" cried Wardlawe, gazing at the face of the mild-eyed Virgin on the icon now affixed to the southeastern wall of the prison room.

A robed priest entered only to be waved away by Allan Law, who said: "I die at peace with all men, trusting in God!"

There was a bustle among the harpies around the hangman as the Major Warden grasped Wardlawe by the arm.

"The time is up! You must now leave us!" the rough fellow implored. "Ah! God! What scenes!"

And as Wardlawe clasped Allan Law in a last embrace a wild shout arose in the deserted street!

The cavalry squadron had wheeled into four platoons, and between the two troops a black wagon was now waiting for its felon load.

But as the stern warden dragged Wardlawe away and Allan Law leaped back into a corner, standing boldly at bay, Valerianoff dashed into the room with a drawn revolver in his right hand, his voice rising to a shriek, as he waved an envelope in his left.

"Hold off!" he cried. "Sentence reversed! The prisoner will be sent for examination to St. Petersburg!"

And then, reeling in a sudden paroxysm, the gallant fellow fell senseless to the floor!

In a scene of wild confusion the room was cleared, and the Major warden, kneeling over Valerianoff, forced a glass of brandy down the adjutant's throat.

"The wires were down for three hours!" whispered Valerianoff, as Allan Law and Wardlawe raised him to Law's couch.

The roll of carriage wheels brought the Major Warden to the jail door.

And then, there burst into the room Radetsky, followed by Colonel Milanovitch, and a dozen officers from the Service Club.

Wardlawe sprang to Allan Law's side.

"Remember, you are a Russian!" he whispered.

And then, the Chief Aide read in a resounding voice the order of Admiral Chestakoff:

"The prisoner, Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff, accused of false impersonation, will be removed to St. Petersburg, via Odessa, on the steamer of the Volunteer fleet 'Tsaritza,' departing forthwith. He will now be allowed the limits of the garrison upon his parole, and the Chief of Staff Alexis Radetsky will make all arrangements for the prisoner's voyage as a passenger of the first class. He will personally see to the deportation of the accused, to whom will be delivered all his effects."

"Come out of this rat hole!" roared Colonel Milanovitch, joyously seizing Allan Law in his arms.

"Our last dinner was interrupted! We will now have the dessert at the club!"

But, Allan Law, with a shaking hand, handed to Wardlawe the two loaded revolvers which he had concealed on his person.

"For God's sake!" he cried, speaking slowly in French, "get away and telegraph to all of my safety! Then"——

"Come to the club!" roared the chorus of officers, as they seized upon Allan Law.

"Molodetz! You are a brave fellow!" cried the Major warden, clapping Allan Law on the back. "You were going to"——

"Kill you first!" politely said Law, "and then, your hangmen!"

"But, my Cossacks would have shot you down!" stammered the Major.

"That was the game!" quietly said Law, gazing through the jail window at Wardlawe departing in the carriage with the horses lashed to a run.

Carried in triumph to the club, Allan Law, now the center of a frantic throng, would touch but one glass of champagne as all drank "To the Czar!"

"Wait, wait!" he said to all, "till Wardlawe returns, and then, we'll have all the jollification that you wish!

After the dinner was over, whereat the French tongue made all hail fellows, Law drew Wardlawe into a corner.

"I wish you to go back to the office!" he said, "and send this dispatch! You can read it!"

It was addressed to the Princess Esmè Chilkoff, care Count Nicholas Ignatieff, 21 Moika, St. Petersburg.

His face was ghastly pale as he said: "Wardlawe, you must give me that picture, for I shall never see her again! She is my dearest foe! She abandoned me to my death!"

"Granted!" said the American, as he read the despatch traced in pencil on the back of a menu:

"I have kept my word! You have broken yours! Adieu forever!"

And yet, as he drove in a leisurely way down to the little telegraph station tower on the hill, Major Wardlawe hummed an old love tune.

"Forever" is a very long time!" he mused, and a mysterious smile wreathed his lips.

"Whatever youth may be, it is not wise! Thank God that the reversals of Time wait on these rash decrees! It's all in the game of Life!"

Philosophically smoking his cigar, he mused: "Some fallen tree in Manchuria, some storm-blown telegraph pole in the steppes is responsible for an agony which will thrill me to my dying day! And my friend Allan Law is a good game lad—a blue hen's chicken!"

When the guests separated at midnight, Sergeant Crampton and the Swiss valet Davol had removed every vestige of Allan Law's effects to the Army and Navy Club.

"You will be escorted to the steamer by every officer in Vladivostock!" said General Alaroff, the doyen of the club.

"All, save the Admiral!" laughed Colonel Radetsky; whereat the Chief of the Kazan Regiment gruffly said: "He is an old woman!"

Four days later Allan Law was the recipient of a

tremendous ovation as the "Tsaritza's" screws began to slowly revolve.

He drew Major Wardlawe into his stateroom. "You have not given me that picture yet, Walter!" the brave Englishman shamefacedly said.

"In return for your address!" firmly replied Wardlawe.

"See here!" said Law, "I will never trust myself in Russia again! Now, Colonel Henry Seaforth Berry, Royal Artillery, commands Woolwich arsenal. A telegram signed by you will fetch me anywhere in the world! You can safely give me the picture! For, I will never see her again!"

Without a word, Wardlawe gave up the golden case.

"What fools we mortals be!" he muttered, but he grasped his chum's hands as the Englishman said: "You owe me a visit in the North Country, and there I'll tell you a strange story. Will you come to me?"

"There's my hand on it!" said the American. "We have stuck closer than brothers, though each was playing his own game! I have to go to St. Petersburg to untangle old Lemacheffsky, and I only do it because the interests of my principals would suffer!"

"Then settle all straight with Petroff!" said Law. "He and I and Levassoff will be at Nagasaki together in two weeks! The Admiral is crazy now to purchase the 'Eighty-five' and to smother her runaway record!"

"Old ass!" said Law. "Don't bother with him! He is not to blame! Wait till I get hold of the author of all this tomfoolery! There will be a monkey and parrot time if I live!"

Out beyond the grim outer forts, the "Tsaritza" plowed away as the lonely Wardlawe returned to the club.

It was over a guest dinner table that Radetsky and Colonel Milanovitch heard the American's final decision.

The "Hiogo Maru" leaves in a week! I will settle my affairs and take leave of Admiral Lemacheffsky by letter. It is better that we should not meet!"

And both the Russians, gravely bowing, agreed with the engineer.

"In fact, these are my orders from Mott and Marsden, who have represented through the Russian Ambassador at Washington that we must have a free field and no foolishness of tchinovik red tape!"

When Wardlawe marshaled his party on the deck of the "Hiogo Maru," Colonel Milanovitch pressed him to his broad breast in a bear hug.

"A little secret, my American friend! I have a telegram from Baron Knorp that I have been promoted to the grade of General and ordered to report forthwith by post express across Siberia at the Ministry of War! I will arrive in the capital ten days before 'Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff' reaches Odessa."

"And so," laughed Wardlawe, pouring the last parting glass of champagne, "His Excellency the Governor-General Admiral Lemacheffsky will not have the last word on the 'affaire Rezoff!'"

"Hardly!" dryly said the old veteran, roaring with delight.

"I will bring your Rezoff's tiger skins home properly dressed when we meet at the Hotel de l'Europe!"

"It has not been such a failure, after all!" mused Wardlawe, "this eventful voyage!"

The American was pacing the deck with his comforting cigar as the steamer swept on to Possiette Bay.

"Our affairs are all in splendid shape! Petroff is already at Nagasaki, with his crew intact, and his voyage overpaid by the profits!

"As for Allan Law, I fancy when he next meets the Princess Esmè Chilkoff he will hardly be "as wax in her hands!' Who wrought this devil's work? Not the daughter of Ayesha! When I reach Japan, she shall read a dispatch signed 'Ahmed,' for Levassoff and Sternberg are perfectly trustworthy! It is a strange world this one of ours! And yet, after all, the best that we have any authentic acount of!"

He left behind him a community scandalized, because General Milanovitch had dared to leave the city of Vladivostock without taking a formal leave of the great Governor-General!

"That man is a fool, Radetsky!" roared the baffled Admiral.

"As Your Excellency pleases!" said the Aide, bowing profoundly.

CHAPTER XI.

HALF THE TRUTH.

Two weeks after the sailing of the "Tsaritza" from Vladivostock the Count Nicholas Ignatieff sat alone in his study on the Moika at St. Petersburg.

The early September sun was fiercely beating down in the canal, and the moujiks lounged lazily in the glowing heat.

Alone in the great mansion, but for the retinue of summer servants, over countless cigarettes, the ex-Dictator studied a mass of papers. Letters and telegrams spread out before him.

He sighed heavily as he rose and paced the long room, like a restless tiger.

Gazing at the trophied arms upon the wall, he took down the saber which he once wielded in the days of the wars of Schamyl.

"Yes, the old days were best!" he gloomily muttered. "I am only a modern Richelieu, a statesman en rètraite! I can fancy how the old churchman, beset with spies, baffled by the 'eternal feminine,' dogged by murderous conspirators, longed to call back the time when he wielded the two-handed sword against the English on the dykes of La Rochelle!"

While the polished floor echoed beneath his heavy tread, the man who had given Russia its death hold on China—he who had moved forward the frontier of Russian Asia Minor to Batoum, Kars, Erzeroum and Baku—saw behind him the dogging specter of Loris Melikoff, his dead arch enemy, and the face of the living incumbent "Tolstoi."

"By the mistakes of greater men, the mediocre

agent—he who shifts responsibility—always succeeds for a time!" mused the Count.

"Two mistakes have wrecked me! The one allowing Alexander II. to give his word to the Queen of England not to enter Constantinople in 'seventy-eight'; the other, in permitting that low Armenian Loris Melikoff to hold up the bright-eyed Dolgourouki as a lure to the aged lover! I should have shot him!

"But, I stood loyally by the aged Czarina! I lost my Ministry of the Interior, my Dictatorship; but I am sadly revenged! The amorous old Czar died miserably on the street stones, on the unlucky thirteenth of March, 'eighty-one'! And, Melikoff, how did he die?

"Alexander III. alone knows, for the man who chased 'La Dolgourouki' to a life-long German exile, to revenge his insulted mother, will not disclose 'the deep damnation' of Melikoff's taking off!

"But, Tolstoi, the 'moderate Minister,' succeeds Melikoff the Tiger, who trapped Ignatieff, the worn-out old bear! Bah! Men of half measures are no men!

"A Czar should have but one 'official conscience,' one friend, one Minister! This Czar lurks half way in the shadow of death—one foot on the sea and one on the shore!

"And yet I must go now and humble myself to Tolstoi, to ask a favor—the first—not for myself, but for another! Poor girl!"

Ordering his carriage, the glittering-eyed Tartar smoothed his long black hair and fiercely tugged at his sparse Chinese mustache, as he went over the papers for the last time.

"It is a game of some veiled intrigue, hidden as yet from me!

"As active Minister I could easily touch all sources of information!

"Now, though rich, I am powerless!

"There is the affair of Dui and Marsden's ocean steamers! This American Major Wardlawe has splendidly steered them between the rocks! They will yield a future harvest of gold and power!

"'Rezoff' is safely on his way home—a first-class passenger on parole!

"Levasssoff, Gorlitz, Gradsky have done well in this, but, the cool American played the hero! Knorp is staunch, old Admiral Lemacheffsky is afraid of me! And yet, what the devil is the secret of this boat expedition?

"And Baron Sternberg insists that I shall come to Frankfort as an Israelite of the tribe of Rothschilds! He will not come here! 'An affair of millions!' If he says so, it is true! I must go!

"But, I must aid Natalie first! My loyal wife! What a noble heart!"

Sweeping the papers into a portfolio, which he locked in a great steel safe, the ex-Minister selected only his wife's last letter.

"I will have nothing left in jeopardy!" the adroit Tartar mused as he dressed himself with punctilious splendor.

An hour later frightened officials scurried around, when the fallen Dictator—greater even in his fall than the urbane Tolstoi—drove into the courtyard of the Ministry of the Interior, on the Nevsky Perspective quai.

An impressive dignity marked this formal visit, the first since the Tartar General had given up the portfolio which is the greatest burden under the Czar.

Officers saluted, guards turned out, officials stood in respectful lines, for, though officially powerless, General Count Nicholas Ignatieff wore every order of the Empire, a dozen more of the proudest in Europe, and the uniform of a full general aide-de-camp of the Czar!

Millionaire tenfold, Count of the Empire and lord of fifty fiefs, he was still the most notable personage in Russia, save De Giers and Gourko, the pen and sword of the new Czar.

On the threshold of the Minister's own salon, the suave Tolstoi—the man "who wore Ignatieff's shoes"—tenderly embraced his "dear colleague."

It was a sight to move even an arch hypocrite, for

the great ex-Dictator had publicly humbled himself to his serene rival!

Left alone together, the eyes of the weaker man instinctively sought Ignatieff's.

"What can I do for you?" he said with engaging candor. "Name it! It is your own will which directs!"

Availing himself of the perfect frankness of the absolute dissimulator, the Tartar General said: "I must know where Prince Agar Chilkoff is! His sister is very ill at my Kiev estate! My wife is frantic! The Princess Esmè is but a wasted white rose!"

The Minister of the Interior dropped his eyes in confusion.

"This is a matter of the Privy Council, my dear colleague! I will tell you all!

"When the Khivan expedition and the railway to Tashkend brought on the Penj Deh trouble, with its English war cloud, Commander, the Prince Agar Chilkoff was detached from his Pacific station and then sent for an indefinite time upon a mission which would prevent the diaffected in Circassia from using him, as the elder Prince Schamyl was used in the Turkish war of seventy-seven, by the Moslems and the sly English!"

"I see—banished, hidden!" said Ignatieff, "so that he could stir up no fire in our rear!"

"Precisely!" sweetly said Tolstoi. "The policy was laid down by *yourself* in advance!"

"True! I had forgotten!" muttered Ignatieff, in confusion. "Does he live?"

The piercing black eyes of the Tartar gleamed like fire.

"He does!" solemnly said Tolstoi, "but for his status, his whereabouts, I must send you to His Imperial Majesty!"

A long silence succeeded.

Ignatieff's lips were working in unframed syllables.

"I should never aim to go above Your Excellency!" he said, with a painful effort.

"Soit! Let that rest!"

"Now, my dear wife only lives in her affection for Esmè Chilkoff! We have no daughter!"

Tolstoi bowed in deep respect.

"And this poor girl is wasting away! Dr. Pauloff and his associates have assured me that she will die unless she spends the coming winter at Pau or, on the Riviera! There is my wife's letter!"

The courtesy of the visit had touched Tolstoi to the heart, and he bowed in grateful approval.

"Moreover, Prince Sacha Menchikoff has tortured her with an unwelcome suit! He is ardent, bold, violent—a man of extremes!

"Telegrams, presents, attempted visits—all these harass the Countess Natalie! Sacha is hovering now around Kiev, and he swears that he will kill any man whom she favors! It is intolerable!"

"What can I do to relieve this unwarrantable annoyance?" said the Minister, brightening visibly.

"Give me passports for her to go abroad for a year! That is your province, my dear colleague, not a Privy Council affair! I will soothe her with telling her that Prince Agar is now on his way home from the South Pacific!"

"Will the Countess Ignatieff take her abroad?" slowly said Tolstoi.

"Madame Ignatieff would prevent this wild-hearted captive—'une femme incomprise'—from being made the center of a political intrigue!"

"Yes!" promptly said the ex-Dictator, "and I will escort them myself, and after establishing them bring them home in the early summer of next year."

"Is this all?" cordially said the Minister.

General Ignatieff bowed gravely.

Touching a silver bell, the Minister said to his Chief of the Chancellerie:

"Passports for a foreign visit!" said Tolstoi, "untaxed, period of one year, for His Excellency General Count Nicholas Ignatieff, the Countess and their suite, as well as for the Princess Esmè Chilkoff. Let them be prepared at once! Bring them to me for a special endorsement! They are to be sent to the Moika, then by a special aide, immediately!"

"You have laid me under an undying obligation!" said General Ignatieff. "You can assure His Imperial Majesty that I will guard the Princess Esmè, and I can now control Menchikoff! I will quiet her mind as to young Agar!

"Both of them are wild mountain eagles, and the 'centralizing system' is an enigma to their proud and valiant natures! I will be responsible!"

Every order shall be telegraphed to the frontiers for the usual courtesies!" soothingly said Minister Tolstoi, "and Monsieur De Giers will give orders to all our Continental Ambassadors that you stand 'in loco parentis!'"

Escorting the illustrious visitor to the foot of the grand hallway, where the guard received the Count with presented arms, the whilom foes parted with a truly Russian fraternal embrace.

"Wolf!" muttered Tolstoi, as he shambled back to his desk.

"Hypocrite!" sneered Ignatieff as he drove to his home and telegraphed to the Countess his immediate return and the orders to prepare for a season out of Holy Russia.

On the long run down to Kiev, the Count Ignatieff felicitated himself on his own adroitness.

"This fortunate illness gives me a legal control of the dashing Esmè for a year! And the Rothschilds and Sternberg must now show their hand!

"For she has her vast accumulations heaped up at Frankfort with them! Wise young rebel! Even Baron Frederick, a Romanoff in blood, keeps his natural father's legacies safely deposited in Holland.

"But I will have my hands full with this wild Sacha Menchikoff! He hunts her as men chase the gazelle, hounding the quarry down for its beauty!

"Or, does he look by a marriage to be Governor-General of the Caucasus! He shall have a rough handling! For she will have none of him!

"And 'l'affaire Rezoff!'—I leave that for Natalie to disentangle! I fancy our captive bird has been slyly casting nets of her own!"

Before the great statesman left St. Petersburg, he spent an hour with the Minister of Marine.

"You and I, my dear Chestakoff!" said Ignatieff, "have too much at stake to let blundering old Lemacheffsky ruin us, at second hand, at Vladivostock! Here is my solution of the 'affaire Rezoff': You control the reports of the Admiral at Vladivostock! The Volunteer fleet, the 'Tsaritza' is under your orders!

"Send an aide-de-camp down to Constantinople to board the 'Tsaritza' on the passage of the Bosphorus! You can quiet the whole affair! And I, in return, will see that you get the credit of turning over the 'Water Witch' to the Siberian service.

"Her type will enable us to control the whole Amoor and its affluents! And you know Wardlawe will be as true to us, as he has been! We are united in purse"——

"And, in person!" cordially cried Admiral Chestakoff, embracing him. "It shall be as you say! I will stamp out all gossip!"

A month later the whole bel étage of the Hotel Choiseul at Paris was given up to the sole occupancy of Madame la Comtesse Natalie Ignatieff and her suite.

But, not even the hardiest "flaneur" could divine the identity of the white-faced young beauty, around whom was gathered all the resources of the infinite luxuries of Paris.

But all the blandishments of the gentle Countess were unable to induce the Princess Esmè Chilkoff to accompany her guardian to the Pyrenees. And so, while the punctilious medical faculty protested, the Countess only awaited the arrival of Nicholas Ignatieff from Frankfort-on-the-Main to apply the "force majeure" of the unbending Tartar noble.

"Only a few days more!" murmured Esmè as she pleaded with her beloved nurse. "Then, I will be as a lamb in your hands!"

"What is it keeps her?" mused Natalie Ignatieff. "It cannot be this mad Sacha Menchikoff?"

For the tempestuous lover had followed on, and the

two Swiss, always on guard, had gravely accepted many cartes de visite of the stormy-hearted noble.

His letters, however, lay all unopened, and, in affright, Natalie Ignatieff looked forward to the return of her stern husband. "Nicholas is still fiery-hearted. He will repulse him! A duel? My God! Never!"

But, hiding her secrets in her sorrowing heart, the beautiful Circassian read—a thousand times—the treasured telegrams of the Count Benno Lansdorf and the somber message of Allan Law.

"'Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff'—a creature of my own fashioning—where does he linger? If true, why no other report? And the time, how long! I must wait and suffer, quand même!"

Only old Ali Roustan, keeping guard over the worshiped divinity, sleeping on the floor in front of her door, knew the secrets of the tortured heart of Ayesha's daughter.

It was on the tenth of October, while the Count Ignatieff still lingered with the Rothschilds and their fellow money kings, that a young man leaped out of a first-class carriage at the station of the Paris, Lyon and Mediterranean Railway.

He was brown with travel; his attire was of quaint foreign cut, yet, his falcon eye and indescribably gallant air made the men sigh with envy, and the women loiterers smile and blush.

A strange-looking attendant followed him, whose eyes rested in wonder on the Babel-like scène around him.

"Hotel Choiseul! A grande vitesse!" cried the stranger, tossing a Napoleon to the cocher.

Dreams of past suffering haunted the traveler as he muttered:

"Ali! Faithful old Ali! Will Roustan be there? My God! I can bear it no longer! What fatal influence pursues me? No replies to my telegrams from Egypt, from Hongkong, and the forty days' voyage has been a long drawn out hell from Malta to Marseilles, from the gulf here!

"For Ali—poor devil!—if there, has not had the wit to answer my telegrams!"

Dashing through the Place Vendôme, the carriage halted at the arched entrance of the Choiseul.

The gold-banded porter touched his hat as the stranger quickly cried: "I seek a Circassian attendant, Ali Roustan; he is ordered to meet me here!"

"Upstairs, au premier, in the suite of Madame la Comtesse Ignatieff and the Princess Esmè Chilkoff!" deferentially said the concierge, hungry for a "pourboire."

They were left alone as the handsome traveler suddenly darted up the marble stairway.

"C'est un de nos vieux patrons!" sighed the porter. "Comme ces Russes sont farouches!"

But, the sound of a quick scuffle reached them!

When the porter slowly gained the first floor, the two Swiss lackeys were rubbing their elbows and glaring at a card picked up from the floor.

"'Le Comte Benno Lansdorf!'" read the porter. "This fellow is a whirlwind!"

And then, he discreetly retired.

On this sunny morning the beautiful Esmè was lying alone, with her maid stroking her wasted hands.

When the door was flung open, a shout of joy from Ali Roustan brought the Princess Esmè to her feet. With a wild cry of delight, the daughter of Ayesha flung herself into the arms of a bronzed stranger.

But the loving welcome "Agar! My own Agar!" had reached the ears of the startled Countess.

When Prince Agar laid his swooning sister down he covered her pallid lips with kisses.

"No, no, ma chère Comtesse!" he cried. "No doctors! Joy does not kill!"

And then, on his knees at his master's feet, old Ali Roustan kissed the ground before the feet of the last Prince of the Adighè.

"Where did you come from, Agar?" cried Natalie Ignatieff, opening her arms. "My son! My wild midnight star!"

"I am only Benno, Count Lansdorf now!" gaily said Prince Agar, throwing himself down beside his sister to warm her again to life, with his passionate caresses. "And I have enjoyed the hospitality of the

Czar for three years as a Siberian convict when you fancied that I was 'on duty with the fleet!' How I was rescued, at what infinite pains—ask this brave heart!"

And then, Natalie Ignatieff, bursting into tears, fell upon the bosom of the joy-stunned Esmè.

"When you thought I was ordered 'on foreign service" I was arrested in eighty-one, in the naval consiracy of Cronstadt!"

"Say no more, not a word, till Nicholas comes! He will be here to-morrow!"

And the great Ambassadress stole away, leaving the two Circassians speechless in the bliss of this meeting, with Ali Roustan—his sabre drawn—on guard at the door. For, the young king of the Adighè was holding a royal court of Love!

It was Madame Ignatieff's quick wit which saw the necessity of preserving Agar Chilkoff's disguise of the title of Count Lansdorf.

"Tell me nothing!" she said, at the little dinner of rejoicing, whereat Esmè Chilkoff already showed the magic of l'Elisir d'Amore, the power of happiness!

The great French physician, on his daily visit, cried "Oho! Ohè! So it is the arrival of the young Count Lansdorf which is to work wonders! Voilà, the power of Love! Nature's one great curative!"

Going happily on his way, the specialist ruminated upon a possible diminution of his fees. "I will keep charge of her up to that wedding, which I see in the distance! There is yet a golden harvest.

"Decidedly, le Comte de Lansdorf's arrival has worked wonders!"

Installed in a splendid corner apartment of the bel êtage, the fame of the wonderful cure was noised through the hotel.

"Decidedly!" cried the comely wife of the concierge, "ce pauvre Prince de Menchikoff a perdu son mètier! The handsome stranger is the coming man!"

And, old Ali Roustan and the young Manchurian soon became the wonders of the courtyard of the quiet Hotel Choiseul.

Linked in their reunited love, Agar and Esmè followed the advice of Madame Ignatieff.

"Keep your own secrets, my children!" she warningly said. "Do not embarrass my husband with the knowledge of your past whereabouts!

"For, this sly Tolstoi has concealed it all this while! I am to know nothing—that is all!

"There are Siberian intrigues in which Chestakoff and the Count are mixed up—future schemes which might be ruined by a disclosure of your escape! Does any one know of your evasion?"

"Not even the gallant Rezoff!" quickly replied Prince Agar. "I am supposed to be yet in the fur camps around Yakutsk.

"It was Petroff, this noble Navy fellow, who bribed a dozen hunters to bring me up the Lena and the Olekma; eight hundred versts to Nertchinsk, and in the blundering upon poor 'Rezoff' as an alleged Englishman, these clumsy officials forgot all about me! I will not be officially missed until the quarterly inspection."

"After you have seen the Count I would advise you to hide at Schloss Karolyi until my husband can quietly effect a pardon!" said the Countess. "Paris is full of Russian spies! We are naturally watched here, and so, Esmè must come away with me to Pau!

"By Lyons to Geneva and Ischl, is an easy run! We can all meet happily in Switzerland! Its air of freedom is death to all tyranny!"

Misled by Ivan Petroff's last words as to the insignificance of Rezoff's arrest, Prince Agar could not understand the rosy flush which covered his beautiful sister's face.

"I dare not tell him all yet!" she muttered, "for I may never see Allan Law again! Even the Count must not know this!"

Kept in ignorance of Allan Law's awful ordeal at the very foot of the gallows, Esmè Chilkoff wondered at the harsh adieu of her English lover.

For, though no words had passed between them, she felt in her proud heart the rebellious floods of loyal blood throbbing. "I love him, loyal and true!

"And yet, he believes that I have been careless and wilfully exposed his life! He shall live to feel my gratitude!"

"There is another reason!" calmly said Madame Ignatieff. "That Sacha Menchikoff should have followed us here to press his unwelcome attentions"—— The gentle Countess ceased, as she saw Esmè Chilkoff carry her finger to her lip.

Alas! for the jealousy of fiery youth!

That night the Prince Agar drew the whole story from the fierce old servitor Ali.

And so, when the Prince Menchikoff again visited the Hotel Choiseul, he chose an evil hour—while Madame Ignatieff had driven to the gare to meet her husband and warn him of the mysterious appearance of the Prince Agar, kept on special duty abroad for three and a half long years!

No detail of the horrors of his life—only his happy home-coming was the Countess' message.

"Those wild young men must not meet!" mused the Ambassadress, "or, blood may fill the cup of joy!"

Alas! While the husband and wife were slowly driving homeward, the Count, stunned with the disclosure, busied rapidly rearranging his fallen card houses—the fierce-eyed Prince Menchikoff sent up a card to Son Altesse la Princesse Chilkoff.

"I must see you for a few moments! I will not be longer denied!" were the penciled words which brought the blood flaming into Prince Agar's cheeks.

The Russian Prince was astounded when a stranger hurled himself on him in the darkened lower corridor.

"Lâche!" cried Prince Agar. "To hound a stricken woman!"

The fragments of his card were contemptuously tossed in Menchikoff's face.

"It is now an affair for the police!"

Leaping forward, the maddened lover drew a concealed revolver. He had not recognized Prince Agar in this bearded boulevardier still clad in summer raiment of Japanese cut.

Jealousy flamed in his heart! "Cursed Austrian hound! You die!" he cried.

But, crushed in Ali Roustan's mighty grasp, the infuriated man howled as the Circassian's knee was planted on his chest.

Picking up the revolver, Prince Agar strode into the office of the hotel.

Dropping his card with the Austrian pseudonym into an envelope, the young man then addressed it to "the Prince Alexander Menchikoff, Imperial Russian Guard."

Forced away from the hotel by a commissary of police, the infuriated Menchikoff set off in a search for seconds.

"I will kill this brute Lansdorf! He is only an attaché! How long is the roll of her lovers? I destroyed the Englishman, Allan Law! Here is his successor!

"She is a modern Bianca Capello!"

The Guardsman never knew of the adroitness with which the brother and sister had in past years purchased young Lansdorf's old feudal estate of the Karolyi, which gave them the local title of Count and Countess Lansdorf.

In that splendid old retreat they had hoped to find a release from the daily espionage of the Third Section, should the Czar drive them forth at last, despoiled.

Only Baron Sternberg knew of this retreat, its accumulated revenues, and the savings of the Governmental Circassian income, slyly transferred from St. Petersburg by his own secret agent.

Half an hour later, Nicholas Ignatieff had learned the headings of Prince Agar's story. The stony-faced diplomat drove directly to the Russian Embassy.

When the Count left the Baron de Mohrenheim an attaché and a Police Commissary quickly departed to find the Prince Menchikoff with an order to quit Paris forthwith.

It was at a salle d'armes they unearthed the half-crazed lover, who calmly said: "When my affair of

honor with the Count Lansdorf is over I will go, and not before!"

With a cool, warning glance, the attaché said: "I care nothing for Monsieur de Lansdorf; to us he is a stranger.

"But, the Count Ignatieff is the legal guardian of Madame la Princesse Chilkoff.

"For your persecutions, you can choose between Mazas prison, 'in contumacy,' or an immediate departure from France! The Ambassador has already telegraphed to Minister Tolstoi! Your passport is revoked, and if you do not proceed to Russia, you will be a cashiered deserter in a week!

"Moreover, I now will swear out wararnts for "an attempt at life!'

"You drew a revolver—coward like!"

When Menchikoff madly rushed at the calm attaché, four men in plain clothes forced him into a cab.

For three days the returned Siberian exile sat closeted with the Count Ignatieff and Baron Sternberg, hastily summoned from Frankfort.

It was easy for the two wary men of the world to see that both Esmè and the Prince Agar knew as yet but half the truth.

"Let us close up our lines, my dear Baron!" said the great Count.

"Wardlawe will be here in three weeks, and before that time, Allan Law will have safely reached Odessa! The American can soon unravel all the tangle!

"For, he came over to San Francisco on the steamer with Ivan Petroff, who has been some one's secret agent!"

"I begin to see the character of my young ward unfolding, and even in the game of cross purposes, I can mark the justice of His Imperial Majesty's Privy Council, as classing her as, "A person dangerous to the State!'"

"Keep her secrets! Let her and Agar remain partly deceived! Neither knows of Allan Law's hideous peril, and I do not wish to move forward the hands of Time! I only hope that this fine fellow Law, your friend and mine, may not be deceived as to this charming Circas-

sian enigma! This young eagle's wings must be clipped!"

And the Baron Sternberg then smiled, looked wise, and drank his Johannisberger in silence.

"To think," laughed Sternberg, "that this chit of a girl has fooled the wily Ignatieff! He has been as wax in her hands! I will not spoil the game! It is a pretty bit of a study in still life, just now!"

While the two men, who had both passed sixty, schemed together for the gold and power which alone now charmed their faded lives, the Baron Sternberg judiciously parleyed with the Princess Esmè.

The Prince Agar, still fuming over his unsettled quarrel with the wild guardsman, openly dazzled Paris as the rich and eccentric Count Lansdorf, an Asiatic traveler of shrouding mystery, but, of a somber magnificence.

The Princess Esmè, "the very rose and expectancy of the fair state," was now as frankly capricious and as charmingly restless as even the wary old Ignatieff could desire.

Even the placid Countess never knew the secret delight with which the fair young rebel's sufferings insired Ignatieff.

"That Allan Law has simply disappeared from Constantinople, via Malta, saying not a word when released by Chestakoff's aide, indicates that my graceful young ward will have some trouble in charming him back to her side!

"At the foot of the gallows is no place for drawing-room explanations, but, the good-hearted Wardlawe may snare the young Briton later for us!

"Did Esmè use him as a cat's paw? Only her open arms will ever lure him back!

"For his stubborn pride is equal to her own, and even Agar seems to know nothing! Madcap witch! She deserves to suffer!"

A tragic occurrence for a moment thrilled all Paris!

All the clubs knew of the miserable death, by hanging, of the young Russian officer who had obstinately refused to leave Paris, and so, had found a "cell of detention" in gloomy Mazas!

To conceal the awful suicide from the Princess Esmè was the hope of Count Ignatieff, but he never knew of the resolution with which Menchikoff had given a cabochon ruby ring, worth twenty thousand francs, to his jailer to carry a sealed letter to the Princess Esmè Chilkoff, under cover to Madame Ignatieff!

"Let us leave this horrible city, at once!" the young beauty cried.

"Not until the arrival of Major Wardlawe!" said the Count Ignatieff. "For, there is yet justice to be done! Interests of vast magnitude hang upon his arrival!"

And then, alone with him, the capricious young queen of the Adighè laid the letter of the demented Menchikoff before her astute guardian.

"I cannot tell you all, till I see Ahmed, Major Wardlawe."

"I must learn all the ordeal of 'Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff!"

"But, you must not believe me; he must not think me a traitress, or a woman who sent him to a horrible death! Read this!"

And her eyes were dreamy and downcast as Ignatieff pondered over the blurred words of the young noble, whose unhappy death had thrown a dozen great families into mourning!

"I give up the game of Life, Esmè," the straggling words began. "I have played my last card, and lost! Strange as it may seem, I loved you too much to see another man ever take you to his bosom! I did lead away Allan Law, the English fool, whom you sent away to avoid my pistol!

"I suppose that you have already forgotten him! It was I who had him followed, by my foster brother, when you sent Law to Siberia, as 'Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff." I denounced him as an Englishman, a secret service spy, by telegrams, to Admiral Lemacheffsky!

"Before I left Russia to follow you here, I had the glad news of his death sentence!

"I laughed when I telegraphed, through the head men of Kharkov, that there was no merchant of the

first class there named 'Rezoff!' And so, you slew your lover! Your Englishman!

"But, as for Lansdorf, your last adorer, the man who struck me, I would have killed him myself, but, I knew the hand which strikes me down—the merciless Ignatieff!

"Farewell! Let Allan Law's fate lie heavily on your head! He died thinking that you had betrayed him—sold him to shame! You are punished! I am revenged! Lansdorf is a cur!"

"Tell me, where is Law?" cried Esmè Chilkoff, "the man who loved me—*the man whom I love!*" She lifted her head proudly in this brave avowal! "I will tell him the truth, and, then, never see him more!"

"My poor child!" said the old Count, laying his hand caressingly upon her bended head. "You were sick, fever crazed, almost at Death's door! We only found Agar's despatch! It was a mystery! What knew I of this Lansdorf masquerade?

"But the noble Wardlawe's warning took me to St. Petersburg! Chestakoff and myself almost went on our knees to Tolstoi and to the Council! The Admiral even implored the Czar! I wished to save you trouble! We beat Death only by half an hour!

"All I know is that Allan Law arrived safely at Constantinople, took a direct boat for Malta, and, presumably, has taken refuge in England!

"But two men can unveil the whole mystery! Sternberg and Wardlawe! And they must meet first! Let me go and see that this poor madman's remains are sent home to Russia under the seal of honor! It was a frightful act of jealousy!

"And so, I shall never see you again, the man who stood in Death's shadow for me, to save Agar!" the Princess sobbed.

A great throb convulsed Nicholas Ignatieff's iron heart!

"Now I see all! You gallant girl!" he cried, as he stooped and kissed her on the brow. "I know that you will yet meet him! Such souls can not be severed!

Neither Natalie Ignatieff, the princely Agar, nor the secretly triumphant Sternberg—not even the Count

Ignatieff, ever knew of the words of adieu which weighed like a sentence of death upon the fair Circassian's heart.

"There is but one who shall share my secret! Ahmed! The brave American who saved Allan Law, even at the side of his opening grave! He knows my heart! He knows why I perilled all, to drag Agar from the hell of Siberia! And now, I can checkmate the Czar! We are both out of Russia, and, I will wear no more chains!

"But, my country! Ah! The land of Ayesha! The purpled mountains! The smiling valleys! The castled hills! The sculptured shores! Shall I ever see my misty mountain Paradise again?"

Two weeks later, at the Havre docks, Ali Roustan fell upon the neck of Major Wardlawe, and made his obeisance to the good-humored Ivan Petroff!

"I am to conduct you to them!" said the old Circassian, giving the Major a letter, which made his heart bound with delight!

The way seemed interminable to Paris, but, as the evening lamps flashed over the gay boulevards, two men went, with bounds, up the marble stairway of the Hotel Choiseul.

Captain Petroff was at once dragged away by the excited Prince Agar, but Ali Roustan drew aside the portfolio of a boudoir, where Esmè Chilkoff, glowing with blushes, threw herself upon the American's breast!

"Tell me, Ahmed!" she whispered, "where is he? His last words, you know them?"

"As he stood ready to die, he kissed your picture," said Wardlawe, "the one you gave me, and cried, 'Tell her that I never kissed her in life, but that with dying lips I sealed my love and faith!'

"That picture rests on his bosom now, wherever he is!" said Wardlawe, fondly gazing at her. "He does not know that you are here!"

"You must find him for me!" said Esmè, as she burst into happy tears.

She read her answer in Wardlawe's eyes, as Prince Agar dashed into the room.

"Brothers!" she said, joining their hands.

"As long as the stars shine, I will love you!" cried Agar; and then, bringing Captain Petroff forward, he said: "This man is now a part of my life! He brought me out of bondage!"

CHAPTER XII.

A DINNER OF SURPRISES.

The great French specialist was astounded at the sudden recovery of the beautiful Princess Esmè Chilkoff, whose rapid strides toward health and happiness were evinced by her long drives in the Bois de Boulogne with that courteous American veteran, Major Wardlawe.

The graceful presence of the Baroness Paula Fadaieff relieved Madame Ignatieff, now the recipient of princely hospitalities at the Russian embassy, and soon "tout Paris" knew that the arch statesman, Count Ignatieff, was daily closeted with Baron Alphonse de Rothschild and the now alert Sternberg.

The Prince Agar had taken a run to the Schloss Karolyi with Captain Petroff and Sergeant Crampton to prepare for the arrival of the Chevalier Möllenhaupt and that pearl of American consuls, Harvey Fox, before the grave seniors had settled all their plans of action.

"It is well," said Ignatieff, "that the Prince Agar continues his incognito of Count Benno Lansdorf, as long as the status of his sister and himself is unsettled!"

And in pursuance of this wise plan, the Schloss was prepared for a magnificent "partie de chasse" and a social reopening.

Even the Baron Levassoff, promoted to the rank of Russian Minister at Lisbon, arriving opportunely, promised to bring his bewitching Countess Ilka Plessky to grace the housewarming of the returned travelers.

"Gradsky, promoted to Nagasaki, can watch over

our interests out there," said Ignatieff to the wary Baron Sternberg.

"But, the first thing you must do, is to have sub-Governor-General Baron Knorp, at Habaroffka, persuade Admiral Lemacheffsky to quash all this 'Rezoff' prosecution and scandals."

"You and your friend, the Russian Ambassador here, can easily persuade Knorp to descreetly inform Admiral Lemacheffsky of this desperate Menchikoff's false denunciation of an innocent man!

"Cable out to him that the true Allan Law went to Khiva and then back to England, and that he will appear at the proper time!

"That 'Rezoff' was a real character, and a merchant of Kharkov *province*, not the *city!* I will even add my cipher dispatch, to turn Lemacheffsky into a friend!"

"Why is all this necessary?" said the financier.

"So that I can prove Prince Agar's entire innocence, obtain orders recalling him, and, then, using these valuable old franchises, make terms for both the brother and sister with the Government!

"Let Prince Agar, when officially pardoned and produced, be made the Deputy Governor-General of the Caucasus! There he will be of infinite use in calming the Circassian frontier, under a responsible Governor-General!"

"I can smooth the way for this by promising Lemacheffsky the wonderful boat, and even its special crew, to supervise the manufacture of duplicates!

"Wardlawe, Mott and Marsden will aid me! It will be an easy way out for the old Admiral, who can then be promoted, pensioned and retired, after introducing these new-type steamers."

"That leaves us free to handle the old concessions of Boris Chilkoff, and to bring the Czar's Government where you and I wish it in regard to the vast commercial future!

"And we must hasten, or General Michael Annenkoff's railway will balk our game! This is our one golden season!"

"The Princess Esmè?" dubiously said Baron Sternberg.

"Is lost, I fear, forever, to Russia!" said General Ignatieff, with a peculiar smile.

"Prince Agar can handle her home estates, and you her finances, but, I fancy the young eaglet will never be caged again!"

"And, with Major Wardlawe's help, I wish to turn this situation to her final profit and comfort!

"We need the evidence of 'Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff' and Captain Petroff, both, as to the continuous voyage of the whole river, with the official records, in a boat 'owned by the Amoor Navigation Company,' built by it, and 'duly licensed,' to revive the priceless old franchises of General Prince Boris Chilkoff!

"I think, between Esmè and Wardlawe, that we will find 'Rezoff' very soon!" smilingly said the old diplomat.

It was all in vain, that Robert Standiford and his beautiful bride, Ethel Raynor, tried to lead Major Wardlawe and the Princess Esmè into a round of festivities, whereat the accomplished Paul Kurtz, now lingering in Paris, endeavored to worm out of Major Wardlawe the secret of Allan Law's mysterious disappearance.

"Poor Menchikoff!" sighed the Secretary of Legation. "Sad as his death was, it was better than murdering Allan Law or being shot in a duel, as a blood offering, to darken Esmè Chilkoff's whole life!

"Wild, unrestrained Tartar nature! He was maddened by the passion which haunted him by day and night! Lord of many things, but not of himself!"

To the evident annoyance of a circle of brilliant young cavaliers, the Princess Chilkoff only went abroad with Major Wardlawe and the Baroness Fadaieff!

The old French specialist was confounded! "No sooner does this conquering hero, Count Lansdorf, bring the roses back to her cheeks, than, pouf! he vanishes into thin air! But, I still scent orange blossoms!

"My patient seems restless, feverish, and yet happy in expectancy!

"A temporary cardiac excitement!" he sighed, thinking of his lost youth.

But Baron Sternberg and the Count Ignatieff knew only too well that the Prince Agar could not hope to conceal his identity long!

"First, a truce with the Government, and, after that, Agar can shed his double incognito!" declared Ignatieff.

While the secret negotiations of Sternberg and General Ignatieff went on marvelously well, the old diplomat guarded the story of Prince Agar's unwarranted arrest, until the Vladivostock court should formally announce the groundlessness of all charges against "Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff!"

"First, Law must be a witness here with Ivan Petroff, before the Embassy, and then, Law can make himself known! The orders for Prince Agar's release will be sent to Baron Knorp, and I can have him report 'the departure of the pardoned man.'"

"But, Prince Agar must remain out of jeopardy until cleared!"

Esmè Chilkoff's hungry heart now hung upon the letters and telegrams of Colonel Henry Seaforth Berry of the Royal Artillery.

In final answer to Major Wardlaw's entreaties, the English officer wrote a manly letter.

"I am tied down here in command of the Arsenal. I cannot leave for a moment! Allan Law is in a peculiar state of mind! Come over as my guest, and assure me of the cogent reasons; then, I will betray his confidence, in so far, that you can steal in upon our friend.

"Once face to face, you can surely persuade him!

"But, if he knew you were coming he would elude you. He is in absolute solitude. Some bitter disappointment seems to have seared his heart!

"I owe you both amends and hospitality!

"Come, as my guest! But make no stir. If Allan Law even saw your name, he might then give us both the slip. He is a singular nature, and some great shock has made him lately both suspicious and defiant!"

"And so," said Esmè, "you will go, at once! Dear Ahmed! Even Agar must not know!"

"Will he come! What can I say to him, Esmè?" said the American.

"Tell him," she faltered, "that I beg him to come to me, to bring my picture back; to hear what I must say to him, in honor, for the sake of womanhood!"

"Then," she cried, "if he turns away from me, I have done my duty! He shall know that I did not betray him"—— Suddenly her face crimsoned, and she grasped her loyal champion's hands.

"Bring him to me, Major Wardlawe!" she cried, smiling through her tears. "There are some things which a woman cannot say! My fate is in your hands!"

"He will come, at my bidding!" gravely said Wardlaw, "for, I think, I understand you, now! I leave at noon, and to-morrow I will be with Colonel Berry. I shall not write you, but only warn you by telegraph when we arrive in France!"

And so, Major Wardlawe dropped out of the busy circle, in which two great interlaced intrigues kept Count Ignatieff toiling like a spider in his web.

A week after Major Wardlawe's departure, the "Count Lansdorf" re-appeared in Paris, in answer to an imperative summon of the ex-Dictator.

He found his sister in a state of wild unrest, which alarmed him.

"Some witchery of this American brother of mine," mused Prince Agar, "but Time alone will tell what strange purposes, this capricious child is working out.

"She needs control, and, yet who dare tame this young eaglet!

"Not I! She is beyond me; a creature of ineffable sweetness, but, with a wayward heart of fire and flame!"

Two weeks after the mysterious "dropping out" of Major Wardlawe, the hospitable Baron Sternberg gave a dinner of note at his sedate country villa at Saint Cloud.

In vain, the Princess Chilkoff pleaded her indisposition to face society.

"Be ruled by me, my dear child," said the great financier.

"It will be a dinner of surprises, and, it is arranged only for you! There will be no external busybodies. May I say that you must come!"

And so, doubting and fearing, Esmè Chilkoff accepted.

Her eyes burned with a dreamy splendor now, which fairly startled her loving guardians.

She knew nothing of the long séances at which the Count Ignatieff, the financier, and Captain Petroff closed up all the accounts forwarded by Dimitri Gorlitz from San Francisco, and the new Minister Levassoff, from Nagasaki.

That the proceeds of the fur speculations was over a hundred thousand dollars was vouched for by the credit with Freeman Smith and Company, closed the sales of the graded furs left safe at Habaroffka, on the Chinese shore, in the hasty flight.

And the Japanese mint returns proved a profit of a hundred and fifty thousand dollars upon the unstamped gold bars bought free of the Emperor's tenth and the export tax, at half their value, from the wandering convicts of the upper Amoor River.

"A noble stewardship, Captain Petroff!" said the two dignitaries, passing and clearing all the sailors' accounts.

"You have performed this dangerous expedition so well that you have cleared the whole boat!"

"If you wish to return to Siberia, we will make your way smooth!

"In a week we will turn over the 'Water Witch' and all her secrets to the Russian Government!"

"I must consult Count Lansdorf!" musingly said the gallant Petroff. "He has the first claim on my life! And our brotherhood has been tried by many perils. I think that Markham and Luke Osborn, with a couple of machinists and firemen, and a man selected from the National Works by Major Wardlawe, can easily direct the reproduction of this type of boat to any extent at Vladivostock and Habaroffka.

"Especially if the first engines are sent on from San Francisco for the different sizes."

"You are right!" mused Ignatieff. "Major Wardlawe will soon return to San Francisco to organize the working parties, for next year, at Dui, and he can take out the man who finally designed and the man who set up the peerless 'Water Witch!'

"As Dimitri Gorlitz will come here on his way to his new post as Minister of Russia for Siam, we will have the aid of both him and Baron Levassoff!

"So, if the Count Lansdorf steals you from us, we must first reward you on behalf of the 'Amoor Navigation Company!'"

On the evening of Baron Sternberg's little dinner of surprises there was an undercurrent of mystery in the assemblage at the villa at Saint Cloud.

The Princess Esmè, by a fancy of her own, appeared robed in almost bridal white, and with no ornaments to heighten her thrilling beauty.

But the Count and Countess Ignatieff, the Baroness Fadaieff, were startled when Ali Roustan, throwing open the door of the salon presented the Prince Agar Chilkoff, in all the magnificence of a complete Circassian costume.

The bushy whiskers of the Siberian traveller had disappeared, and the young Prince had resumed all the proud bearing of the Tcherkess noble.

They were seated at table, the Princess Esmè, facing her host with her brother at her right, and a vacant place was at her left, with another seat opposite the Baroness Fadaieff.

"I will give our two other guests but five minutes' grace!" said the wary host, noting his watch.

"But, I hope that we shall not be obliged to proceed without them!"

The Princess Esmè eyed her smiling host with a secret tremor in her heart, until the roll of wheels startled the party, for they were already adroitly lured to the table.

The fair Circassian sank back in her chair as the butler announced "Monsieur Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff," and then, "Major Wardlawe!"

The walls seemed to reel as the young Tcherkess queen lifted her eyes, and she saw the fond glances of the adopted brother of her heart!

It was the Allan Law, of old, who was bending over the hand of the Countess Ignatieff, and who was now approaching the woman whose picture was resting even then on his bosom, said: "May I be pardoned for my appearance in the disguise of society! But I have now forgotten all other names save 'Rezoff!'"

As their hands met under the table, Allan Law felt the ring which had been his talisman, drop into his palm!

"Let me introduce myself as your sick river pilot, 'Serge Alexandrovitch!'" cried Prince Agar, as he clasped the impassive young Englishman in his arms.

"So, *you* were the man who whistled opera airs and Circassian love songs under my very cabin window!" said Allan Law.

"Now I can see why you hid your face from me!"

"I fancy you will be familiar with it, in the future!" softly murmured the Prince.

But the host saw the strain upon the heart strings of the woman whose eyes were now timidly fixed upon the face of Allan Law.

"We will begin with passing a loving cup!" gaily said the partner of Rothschild.

"But first, I must read a telegram which Admiral Chestakoff has sent to General Ignatieff!"

Esmè Chilkoff was leaning forward in a rapt attitude, as slowly the words fell from the lips of her secret agent.

"His Imperial Majesty the Czar, two weeks ago pardoned Commander Prince Agar Chilkoff of the Imperial Navy, for an alleged participation in the naval plots of 'Eighty-One,' at Cronstadt! The Czar has been graciously pleased to retire Prince Chilkoff from the Navy with the rank of Captain, and to designate him as Sub-Governor-General of the Caucasus. Baron Knorp, at Habaroffka, reports that the Prince has already started from the Yakutsk region, and will make his way down the Amoor to Nagasaki, and thence, homeward, by steamer, via Hongkong! The Czarina

has obtained the concession that the Princess Esmè Chilkoff may now take up her residence at Dariel, under her brother's guardianship, all interdicts against the joint estates being withdrawn!"

Allan Law murmured, in the Princess Esmè's sole hearing: "And so, we will lose you, from the Neva!"

Prince Agar threw his head up with a lordly disdain.

"I fancy that I must play at being Count Lansdorf for a month or two longer!"

"It would be better," suavely said the Count Ignatieff, "to kill the hidden scandal of the past, by going to Schloss Karolyi with the Princess Esmè, until you can really 'arrive' officially!"

"But now, Prince, tell us the true reason of your unwarranted arrest?"

All eyes were turned upon the young Circassian, who said: "I was foolish enough to give the use of my quarters to a friend, at the time of the horrible plots which ended in the murder of Alexander II.

"A romantic love affair with the daughter of the Governor of Cronstadt led my friend, Captain Destaieff, to meet the beautiful girl in my rooms, with her one confidant, an aunt married to one of our squadron commanders.

"I was away with the torpedo flotilla all summer. They feared a proud father's opposition. The keys were stolen from poor Destaieff by a circle of madmen, in whose hearts a desperate nihilist conspiracy had spread like wildfire.

"Knowing that the rooms were never used by me in the evening, and always informed of my absence and the location of the flotilla, they hid their dangerous documents in my rooms, under cover of my rank and undoubted loyalty!

"Tracked one by one, to a grand midnight rendezvous, one night, the whole circle was arrested there!

"Alas! Twenty-eight of them disappeared, never to be heard of again. Poor deluded madmen!

"Myself, awakened, in a summer night's balmy sleep on my own gunboat, I was secretly dragged to

the shore at Wiborg! A suit of convict's clothes was forced upon me.

"Sent under a heavy guard alone in a car of Nijni Novgorod and Ekaterinberg, I was hastened by post khilgitkas, past Tomsk, on to far away Yakutsk!

"Three long years I wandered on the banks of the Lena, deprived of all news of my darling Esmè, who was ignorant even of my alleged crime!

"But I will pass over the horrors of this death in life! I was simply a deportè, not a felon convict.

"It was only from my old club-mate, Prince Outkosky, that last year I learned of the fatal descent upon my quarters. He took me away into the forest, and there, on a sheet of his note-book, I wrote my fate and whereabouts to Esmè, my brave sister!

"Destaieff, poor fellow, half crazed at my disappearance, never knew of the robbery of the keys, of which fac-similes were made!

"Outkosky only learned this from the Prince, his father, who was President of the 'Court,' which adjudged some terrible secret doom to these hotheaded naval ensigns, all mad youngsters!

"And all my friends feared that I had been stirring up a revolt in Circassia.

"But the official announcement that I was abroad on a 'four-years' cruise,' quieted the gossip, and, even my mountaineers believed it.

"It was well that this fraud was perpetrated, for the Tcherkess tribes would have risen to a man! That would have sealed my doom!

"I have kept Destaieff's secret! He is, now, happily married, and, poor Outkosky was killed in a Turcoman foray this year. God bless his memory!

"So he, who safely sent the news to Esmè, never heard of my escape!

"I was thunderstruck when Petroff's hunters found me on the upper Lena, and told me of the Amoor Navigation Company's coming steamer!"

All eyes were turned on the Princess Esmè, who said: "And now, I will dissolve 'The Amoor River Navigation Company!'

"My noble Baron Sternberg, who carried out every

secret plan, Captain Ivan Petroff, the brave and devoted agent selected by Dimitri Gorlitz, the San Francisco Consul, Major Wardlawe, who innocently handled the 'Water Witch,' so as divert suspicion of her real character, and "—— she faltered, "Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff," she said, with glowing eyes, "whose presence was solely intended to veil Petroff's busy schemes to find and release my beloved brother, it being intended that he should merely divert the authorities, and that, if detained, it would be simply some farcical frontier bit of red tape.

"But, the pathway which led my beloved Agar out of captivity, led Allan Law to "——

"*A very pleasant dinner in Paris!*" gallantly said the calm Englishman, rising and kissing the trembling hand of the Tcherkess Queen.

"I cannot speak before you all," said Esmè, "but here is one who can tell how nobly Allan Law kept silence, even in the shadow of the gallows, that Agar might be safe on the high seas before his flight should be discovered.

"I only invented the Amoor Navigation Company's new enterprises," faltered the Princess Esmè, "to save my brother's life, after studying some old papers of my father. I dared confide in no one in Russia!"

"Not even in me, you delightful witch!" cried Count Ignatieff, rising, "but, your labors prove at last that a woman can keep a secret!"

"You have given to Baron Sternberg and myself the means to bring the Government to a forced truce, and incidentally, you have performed a great public service!"

"And as I have obtained the full pardon of 'Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff," who disappeared forever as a Russian entity, when secretly released at Constantinople, there is no reason why his name should ever be mentioned lest it should embarrass poor old Admiral Lemacheffsky, and the noble Baron Knorp, as well as General Milanovitch and Captain Valerianoff, soon expected in Paris!"

"For this reason," said Baron Sternberg, laughing. "I will request my noble friend, Lord Waldemere, to

put away all the memories of 'Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff's' ordeals!"

The Princess Chilkoff gazed, in astonishment, at Allan Law, who slowly rose with a heightened color and simply said: "Here is the game fellow, my American friend, Major Wardlawe, who prevented by his judicious boldness, the fiery old Admiral from hanging an English peer, under a purely Russian name."

"It was only when I dropped in upon Colonel Berry at Woolwich, that I found, in my absence, my uncle Allan, Lord Waldemere, had left me the family title, with a fine old place in Northumberland, and a gallant old castle near Jedburgh, across the border!"

"So, my friend," he said, "let us drink to the health of the 'Amoor Navigation Company,' of which I was an humble representative, for a time. I shall probably never visit St. Petersburg again!" Lord Waldemere smilingly said.

"But you will visit Circassia, if I have to drag you there!" cried Prince Agar.

"Perhaps," said the young nobleman, "but, I fear that you will be so busied with the Princess Esmè's return."

"You must come!" bravely said the pallid woman. "You obeyed me once, and you must be there, when the tribes greet their lord and master after all these many years."

The dinner was one which was unforgotten by those who gazed upon Esmè Chilkoff in her tender beauty.

"Beware the sudden shock of any great emotion!" the great specialist had whispered to the Baroness Fadaieff, and so, it was only by a happy chance that the Princess Esmè and Lord Waldemere found themselves alone for a moment.

"To-morrow!" whispered the eager lover, as he held up the ring, now gleaming upon his finger.

"Major Wardlawe and Agar will be busy with the Baron and Count Ignatieff," said Esmè. "I was going to drive to Versailles with the Countess," said the humbled beauty, "but, I have changed my mind!" she said dropping a rose from her bosom, into his hand.

In her eyes was all the yearning of a noble woman's

boundless love, the infinite tenderness of a royal nature eager to crown the man who would have died for her, to hail him as the lord of her gentle bosom.

With graceful tact, Major Wardlawe departed, first with Lord Waldemere.

As the two men drove homeward in the mellow starlight, the Englishman said: "I have a confession to make to you, Wardlawe! I shall never feel at rest, in my heart, till you know why I am willing to owe my life to you, of all men!"

"Not to-night! Some other time, Lord Waldemere!" gravely said the American soldier. "I can fancy a part of what you would say!"

"To-night must be given over to the memories of our strange Siberian experience! Come over to my rooms at the Continental and have a cigar."

When the friends descended at the great hostelry, a haggard figure slunk forward and accosted Lord Waldemere.

"Give me a few hundred francs," the drunken outcast of the night tremblingly said. "I served you well, but, that devilish bump at Dünaberg robbed me of fifty thousand francs!"

"Hold! Let me square accounts with my friend, Hugo Mandell!" cried Major Wardlawe, springing forward.

"You were very good company, and, you spared my life, when I was at your mercy!"

"Here is a hundred pound note! Go, and, let him alone!"

"I knew that fellow's voice the moment he spoke!" musingly said Major Wardlawe.

"After all, Waldemere," he laughed, "all's well that ends well, and, after all, all's fair in love and war! Come into the café! We will bury the past, in a cold bottle!"

"It *was for England,*" eagerly cried the ci-devant Allan Law.

"Let us forget it!" good humoredly cried Wardlawe. "You are now yourself 'held by the enemy!' I leave you to find out all the dangers later of a Russian alliance!"

"Mind, I was a fool to take up such a trust, at a venture! I know, now, that Berry and you only wanted the secret dispatches! I had my peril, you your's! Let us drink to the repose of the soul of poor Menchikoff! He was crazed by his ferocious jealousy! It is the old case—the smile which blessed one lover's heart, has broken many more! Thank God, peace smiles on us all!"

As the Countess Ignatieff parted with the Princess Esmè for the night, the peerless Circassian suddenly threw her arms around her friend's neck. "I am so happy, so happy, Natalie! It all seems a dream!"

"Do not distress yourself with the past, Esmè," fondly said the ex-Ambassadress. "Agar and Major Wardlawe have told Allan Law all, which clears you of aught in connection with this terrible peril! It was a mad plan, but, wonderfully well carried out!"

"And I never can call the son of my early friend Waldemere. To me, he will always be Allan Law!"

"To me, he will be 'Serge Alexandrovitch Rezoff!'" cried Esmè, hiding her blushes in flight!

The very stars seemed to sing for joy as the young beauty unclasped her girdle for the night.

"To-morrow!" she whispered.

And as she woke, an exquisite basket of roses greeted her with a little note which simply has the two pencilled words "at ten," and then Esmè gazed at the unfamiliar card.

With a quick glance, she kissed it, and thrust it in her bosom.

"He would have died for me," she slowly said. "He shall live to learn my love! And to walk through Ayesha's gardens with her happy child!"

When Ali Roustan introduced Lord Waldemere into the room where the Princess Chilkoff awaited the man whom she had unwittingly sent to his death, all the fine phrases, all the studied self-command forsook the queen of the Adighè.

A new woman seemed to have replaced the defiant falcon of St. Petersburg, the flashing-eyed rebel whom even a Czar feared to handle without the "official gloves" of the Privy Council!

"I hardly know what to call you now," stammered Esmè, glancing shyly at the man, who had recovered all his Pall Mall studied correctness of attire.

"Call me Serge!" softly said Allan Law, taking both her trembling hands.

"I have brought back to you this picture, which Wardlawe gave me to sustain me when I thought that you had deserted me, forgotten me, perhaps even abandoned me!"

He laid the jeweled picture case on the table beside her.

"But, not betrayed you!" cried Esmè, her eyes flooded with a soft and tender light.

"You know that Agar is the last of his line! You, now, know how I plotted for his release, fearing that even one imprudent word might send Agar to the Tundra of the Lena, to the depths of the salt mines, or —to the gallows! He owes his life to you! He will repay! My people, our brave Tcherkess, you know them now; they will adore you!"

The man, whom a happy accident had made an English peer, gazed into the gleaming eyes of the woman, whose face had haunted him at the very foot of the gallows! "I ask for nothing at their hands. I want you, Esmè, *only you!*"

"How could you dream that I would send you, unwittingly, to your death! That I would let you die without knowing how I love you?"

She was looking up into his face, her hand resting on his breast, and his strong arms were around her—a very girdle of love!

"And I lay sick, almost unto death, and forgot the fight with death, for Agar, for you, in my fevered dreams!

"But, for Wardlawe's headlong boldness, but for the Count humbling himself to ask for me, what he would not for himself, you would have been lost to me, Allan!" cried the Star of the Tcherkess, smiling upon him through happy tears.

"The Count Ignatieff!" cried Ali Roustan, a summons which sent Lord Waldemere confusedly to the

window, and the Princess Chilkoff rose in a strange tremor.

"A la bonne heure!" mischievously said General Ignatieff. "I did not expect to find Lord Waldemere here!"

"Spare us, General!" the English noble said, coming frankly forward. "You, who gave her to me; you, who saved her brother's life, should be the first to know"——

"That our lives will flow on together, now, to the end!" bravely said the Princess Esmè, clasping her lover's hand.

There was still a touch of the old, defiant ring in her voice.

"I came," said General Ignatieff, smiling in his mystic way, "to smooth the pathway of both you and your brother! If you authorize me, as your guardian, Princess Esmè, to ask the Czar's permission for your marriage to Lord Waldemere, it will be instantly granted; it will cover the awkwardness of Prince Agar's rapid return; it will save Baron Knorp and Admiral Lemacheffsky all the toil of concealing the 'Rezoff' and 'Allan Law' episodes!

"And, if I must say so, a union with Lord Waldemere will be a guarantee that no anti-Russian agitation will occur in your Circassian domains!"

"Beg him to act, Esmè!" laughingly said Lord Waldemere. "You only lose one name in this marriage, while I lose two!

"Baron Sternberg's enormous financial influence, joined with my own request, will smooth your future beyond all cavil or uncertainty," said the smiling diplomat.

"For, Lord Waldemere, in making this entire voyage, in a boat owned by the daughter of General Prince Boris Chilkoff, you have revived a franchise of great value, and, as it was granted as a virtual monopoly, you can see that the truce of the Czar will be well bought, when he releases the heritage of Prince Agar and your intended bride from a military suzerainty. In return for this, we will receive a great sum to surrender the old rights, and have new privileges."

"You will please concert with Baron Sternberg, and obtain the Emperor's gracious permission, General!" said the Circassian beauty, with her dreamy eyes downcast.

"The marriage must occur at Schloss Karolyi, for there we can have all our friends around us! Doctor Pauloff must be summoned as my guest, for he saved my life!"

"And, when will this marriage occur?" Count Ignatieff demurely questioned, gazing at the now reluctant girl.

"As soon as possible!" gravely said Lord Waldemere. "I have sent my steam yacht around to the Riviera, and I wish to take the new 'Water Witch' to Batoum, and so, the Princess can reach her home at Dariel as a bride, in stately guise.

"Let it be a month from to-day, at Schloss Karolyi!" said the beauty, frankly giving Lord Waldemere her hand.

"You really need a guardian, Esmè," cried General Ignatieff. "You have broken nearly every law of Russia, save those forbidding actual armed rebellion!

"And, after all, we lose little, for we still have you—and, we gain an English ally!

"Waldemere! You know how our hearts go out to you! Let nothing cloud your happy love! You are held by the enemy! You will never escape Esmè's chains!"

"Take me, and punish me for both!" laughed the happy Princess, throwing her arms around her foster father.

"I am only sorry that I dare not tell the Emperor and Empress how gallantly you saved your brother's life, but, to reopen the Cronstadt horror, to bring out the tragedy of Menchikoff, would only call back the murder of Alexander II. and all Louis Melikoff's blind butcheries!"

"We have all been 'as wax in her hands,'" smilingly said Lord Waldemere. "Playing a game in which she has won all hearts, as well as taken every trick!"

"All's well that ends well!" gaily said General Ignatieff. "I will have the whole circle at dinner this even-

ing, here, for my position as guardian, for the year, of the Princess Esmè's passport, gives me the right to say, officially, that the Czar will approve this union!"

"I wish to send Ali Roustan and the Baroness Fadaieff, at once, to St. Petersburg!" said the Princess Esmè, "for, 'Serge,'" she said, turning to Lord Waldemere, "I shall be married in my Circassian robes! All my beloved personal effects will be removed to Schloss Karolyi, and then the palace assigned me by the Czar can be gratefully yielded up by you, General!"

Lord Waldemere never forgot his obligations to Madame Ignatieff for that charming lady's unconcerned conduct of the dinner in her own salon, at which Major Wardlawe and Prince Agar learned the tidings, whose signal of a sweet surrender now burned upon Esmè Chilkoff's fair cheeks.

"I shall take Wardlawe and Petroff away with me, to-morrow, to Schloss Karolyi," gaily said Prince Agar. "The Major soon goes on to St. Petersburg, and your probationary period of a month just gives me the time to 'officially appear' as landing at Brindisi.

"But I will let another fortnight, after that, pass before I apply for passports to go to the Neva and receive my official instructions.

"We must bury every secret connected with the cruise of the 'Water Witch' on the Amoor!"

On the upper terrace of the Schloss Karolyi, a month later, a group of happy guests were gathered, gazing down at the magnificent sunset as the purpled Alps began to throw long shadows over the Kammer See and the jeweled Frauen See.

The haughty Austrian nobles of Ischl had noted the convocation at the old Schloss with an ill-concealed curiosity.

For Salzburg had been the Mecca of a strangely assorted company, who wondered at the Princess Esmè's strange fancy to choose the sunset hour for her bridal!

"Some trace of the old fire-worshipers in this," said the Baron Sternberg, blazing with the decorations which the kings of finance receive from their "best customers," the War Lords!

But, a blast of silver trumpets called the assembly to

the great hall, now lit with wax candles in silver sconces; the soft luster resting upon the trophied arms, the spoils of the chase, and the tattered banners of the departed Lansdorfs!

A Greek orthodox altar had been erected where once the old feudal lords judged their retainers, and a burst of exquisite music, led up to the choral chanting of the Russian choir.

When the doors to the right and left opened, the Princess Esmè Chilkoff entered, attended by the Count and Countess Ignatieff, as " Peré et mêre d'honneur."

The beautiful rebel was leaning upon the arm of her brother, and the two heirs of the Tcherkess crown were robed in the surpassing splendor of their mountain land.

Captain Valerianoff and Ivan Petroff, in the uniform of the Russian army and navy, held the jeweled crowns over the bride and groom, when Lord Waldemere entered, attended by the American Major and a sturdy British officer in the full dress of a field officer of the Royal Artillery.

Gathered in a semi-circle around the kneeling pair were Admiral Chestakoff (diverted on his way to the Riviera), Minister Baron Levassoff and his bewitching Polish countess, the astute Gorlitz, proud of his St. Andrew's cross and riband; with the Baroness Fadaieff and the bustling old Surgeon Pauloff.

It was not strange that Paul Kurtz forgot all his diplomacy in attending Mrs. Robert Standiford, whose husband stood with the alert Consul Harvey Fox.

Old Ali Roustan, clad in his silvered chain-mail armor, was a gallant figure, and, from the galleries, the household of the feudal pair looked down upon the medieval scene!

The Chevalier Möllenhaupt beamed upon the noble pair, as they three times made their circuit of the altar!

When the last chants had died away, a concealed orchestra burst into the Russian national anthem!

And then, the Minister of Marine and the ex-Dictator gravely saluted the peerless bride!

" Russia's law and church gives you both its sanction and blessing!" said the great diplomat.

" With this Imperial permission of marriage, I transmit the patent of a Countess of the Empire to the Princess Esmè Chilkoff, in her own name, antedating these marriage rites!

" Sent," said Admiral Chestakoff, " on behalf of the Czarina, to the sister who saved a brother's life!"

And then, the Baron Sternberg approached, with a young page at his side.

" This coronet of a countess," the financier gravely said, " links your feudal sovereignty of the Tcherkess tribes loyally to the mightiest power on earth! It is my gift! May every diamond, only, grow brighter with years!"

At the supper which followed, it was General Milanovitch who gave the health of the bride, in an unstudied speech which made the banquet room ring with cheers!

And then, " Berry of the Artillery" said a few words which made Lord Waldemere grow grave.

For the memories of old service days came back to call up "full many a friend in battle slain!" And, only Wardlawe knew how Esmè Chilkoff had captured two foes of her country.

When the glad shouts subsided, Prince Agar Chilkoff, standing with his radiant sister, clasped Major Wardlawe's hand!

" Here is one!" he cried, " who shall not escape us! The brother of our heart! For he shall come to us, and hear the Circassian eagle's glad cry of freedom as he soars over the peaks of Dariel!

" To him, we owe a life now inexpressably dear to us both! To Captain Petroff, henceforth, the intendant of all my estates, I owe my own, for he guided the 'Water Witch,' through storm and danger to my relief!

" And now, the old Amoor Navigation Company goes forever out of existence!

" For the Imperial Government has acquired the fastest steamer in the world, with all the privileges

which the children of Boris Chilkoff gained from that father who died for the Czar!

Out into the mellow starlight, an hour later, the stern old Ali Roustan guided Lord and Lady Waldemere, whose waiting train stood ready to bear them, by Bregenz, Constance, Geneva and Mont Cenis, to Nice.

There, the new "Water Witch," flying the meteor flag of England, lay ready to glide away into the cloudless glow of eastern skies, where the planet of Love lights the splendid gorges of Dariel!

A hunter's chorus followed them out into the night, as Prince Agar rallied his guests for the dance of the "flambeaux!"

Major Wardlawe and Captain Valerianoff stood together, as the distant lights swept down the glen to the railway station!

"You go with General Milanovitch, at once, to St. Petersburg," said the American.

"I will be there, with my bodyguard of Sergeant Crampton and Devol, in two weeks!

"For I shall hasten away across Siberia to begin the labor of erecting the great works! These young merry-makers must release Admiral Chestakoff and the Count and Countess Ignatieff, but the others will stay and share Prince Agar's merry prison life here, until he is permitted 'officially to exist!'

"But, we have a tryst for next year with the Waldemeres at Dariel!" gaily cried Valerianoff.

"This season will be my last professional tour!" cried the Major.

"I have strangely made a fortune by my connection with the Amoor Navigation Company. I will come to Dariel to meet you, Valerianoff, for, but for your gallant ride from the station, our friend 'Rezoff' would never have taken his seat in the House of Lords, or 'reported his proceedings' to his mysterious principal, that sweetest of feminine rebels, the Princess Esmè!"

"I must get a promotion for that sturdy Danish telegraph chief!" cried the gallant Valerianoff. "For he threw the whole lines open for us, and sent hundreds of men out to inspect the Manchurian relays!

"One half an hour's delay in repairing that wire and Waldemere would have gone mutely to the gallows!"

"I have just learned a little secret of my own," bashfully said Valerianoff. "Count Ignatieff has secured my promotion to the rank of Major, which will enable me to give General Milanovitch a delightful shock on our arrival on the Neva!

"For his bright-eyed daughter Olga will be with me, as my wife, next year, when we meet in Agar's quaint old Circassian palace!"

"And so, you, too, mingle love and war, you young rascal!" laughed Wardlawe, as Prince Agar sought out Major Wardlawe as a partner in the mazurka for the bewitching Countess Ilka Plessky!

"You must come and see me at my old chateau," that wilful young beauty said, an hour later, to Wardlawe, whose heart was still strangely wrung with the fate which had given Esmè Chilkoff to another!

"You are a gallant and a loyal man!" the serpentine Polish beauty said, in a whisper, as they parted.

"I have surprised your secret! It lingers in your loyal eyes!

"For, I saw you gazing on Esmè as the rings were exchanged! Some one says 'It is hard to look upon happiness through another man's eyes!' Now, come to us in Poland! There is always necessary to every man two women, one whom he loves, and one who loves him! *Let me be the last!* Bring me back this token!" and, as she fled away, with a glance which transfixed him, she left her glove, warm, perfumed, soft and inviting, in his hand!

"Dreams!" sighed the stern soldier. "Boyish dreams! Ich habe gelebt und geliebt!"

For his heart was far away now, lingering by a grave in the great western land—a grave which called back Isabel, the sweet wife who fell asleep in her youthful beauty—with the roses clinging to the folded hands he had so often fondly kissed!

[THE END.]

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